

DEPARTAMENT DE FILOLOGIA ANGLESA I ALEMANYA

GENDER, IDENTITY AND TRADITION IN MEERA SYAL,
NISHA MINHAS AND B. K. MAHAL: LIGHTS AND
SHADOWS IN UNWRITTEN RULES OF CONDUCT.

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*Gender, identity and tradition in Meera Syal,
Nisha Minhas and B.K. Mahal: lights and
shadows in *unwritten rules* of conduct*

Doctoral dissertation presented by
Milagro Blasco Llopis

Supervised by
Dr. José Santaemilia Ruiz

València, 2009

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Abbreviations used in this thesis

<i>AM</i>	<i>Anita and Me</i> (1996)
<i>LHH</i>	<i>Life Isn' t All Ha Ha Hee Hee</i> (1999)
<i>DD</i>	<i>Difficult Daughters</i> (1998)
<i>AMW</i>	<i>A Married Woman</i> (2003)
<i>Ch or Ch</i>	<i>Chapatti or Chips</i> (2000)
<i>S and S</i>	<i>Saris and Sins</i> (2003)
<i>P and P</i>	<i>Passion and Poppadoms</i> (2004)
<i>B and B</i>	<i>Bindis and Brides</i> (2005)
<i>TMM</i>	<i>The Marriage Market</i> (2006)
<i>TDH</i>	<i>Tall, Dark and Handsome</i> (2007)
<i>TPG</i>	<i>The Pocket Guide To Being An Indian Girl</i> (2004)

You can't just throw two strangers together and expect fireworks. Religion, tradition and culture do not make good gunpowder. Only love does. You just have to hope it doesn't blow up in your face.

(Saris and Sins 2003:194)

INTRODUCTION AND METHOD

During my very first stay in London, I came in contact with very different ethnic groups for the first time in my life. Not only did I regard it as an enriching experience but it also awoke my curiosity as to the way the so called ethnic minorities would think, behave and regard their relationships with other groups either British or non British. Every time I go back and think about this experience-which changed my life in many ways-I can not help thinking about one thing. One evening while watching the film *A Time to Kill* based on one of John Grisham's novels I wondered how black people would feel watching it. At that time I was living in an area where most of the citizens belonged to an ethnic minority. This adaptation of John Grisham's bestseller takes place in the small town of Canton, Mississippi, where two White rednecks kidnap, rape and savagely beat a young Black girl. The men are caught, but the child's deeply enraged father, Carl Lee Hailey, takes justice into his own hands by killing the thugs himself. Now Carl Lee Hailey is the one on trial, a highly controversial and fiery proceeding that begets numerous racial issues and incidents, some involving the Ku Klux Klan and the NAACP¹. At the centre of this storm is White lawyer Jake Brigance, who not only faces an all-White jury, but personal attacks on his life should he win the case. Brigance, Hailey and Ellen Roark, a rich law student aiding Jake, face a tough road ahead of them, one that will change their lives forever. Three years later I decided to do my PhD. In one of the papers for my doctoral courses I analysed the British talk show *Parkinson*, broadcast on BBC1. Among other issues, I analysed the social and ideological role of the talk show in relation to racism and Critical Discourse Analysis. The interviewees on that occasion were Halle Berry, Natalie Cole, Rod Stewart and Pierce Brosnan. In one intervention, Halle Berry referred to the fact that in order to stop racism the black community had to embrace themselves first. The whole interview made me think about racism once more and be more interested in the topic. Shortly after that, I watched a programme about Hanif Kureishi, a very important and representative Asian writer in England whom I found fascinating and became the cherry on the cake regarding my decision for my thesis. By the time I thought about the project for my thesis not many British-Asian born women were writing or at least they did not have the same media and academic reception like other writers such as Hanif Kureishi, Salman Rushdie or Meera Syal, the latter as the exception to the rule. As I will argue later not many books

¹ NAACP stands for *The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People*. Its primary focus is the protection and enhancement of the civil rights of African Americans and other minorities.

by British-Asian born women could be found until the year 2007 where the literary market seemed to start moving in a different direction. The same year I started working on my thesis. I still remember the difficulties I had in finding books by British-Asian born women in English bookshops. Now three years after having initiated my project the literary market seems to be characterised by a new literature. Therefore although there is still a long way to go the British literary market is slowly opening a new window through which to portray the realities and experiences of a group of today's British society that seems to have been kept hidden for years; a reality inevitably linked to the definition of the individual's identity and a particular culture. I am not talking about a long time ago but about the last three years.

I cannot continue this thesis without considering that many researchers have focused on the analysis of language and gender. However, in this dissertation I will try to show the type of gender relations in the specific case of second generation Asian/British-Asian people in the Anglo-Saxon culture, and referencing it to the first generation and the members of the host community. I propose a reading of the books in the line of conduct books following Armstrong and Tennenhouse (1987). The strictness of the Indian culture, and I add nothing new here, is known worldwide. When I came across the primary bibliography, and although *we cannot judge a book by its cover*, my perception was that they would include references to what would be regarded as correct and incorrect conduct as books written by writers between two cultural arenas, the British and the Indian one, with a whole and divergent system of thoughts and values, or as McClellan (2006) would say "go-betweenness". The point here would be the way the code of conduct dictated by the Indian tradition system would be preserved, and thus, accepted, or challenged in a society of culture clash and the way it would shape and determine gender relations between the white population and the British-Asians, among the British-Asian themselves and between the younger and older generations.

First of all, though, it is relevant to clarify that by first generation I refer to the people born in India and arrived and settled in England from the 50's and 60's, so born and bred in the subcontinent and the second generation as those born and bred in England, most of whom have never been to India.

By the time I closed the corpus so as to set a limit to the material to be analysed the books and female authors that better reflected the main concerns of our study were:

➤ Meera Syal

Anita and Me (1996)

Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee (1999)

➤ Nisha Minhas

Chapatti or Chips (2000)

Saris and Sins (2003)

Passion and Poppadoms (2004)

Bindis and Brides (2005)

The Marriage Market (2006)

Tall, Dark and Handsome (2007)

➤ B. K. Mahal, *The Pocket Guide To Being An Indian Girl* (2004)

The reasons for having chosen these authors and works were several and of a different kind. All of them are female writers born in England but whose parents came from Asia, and more specifically, the Indian Subcontinent. As such not only are they aware of contemporary British society but they are also direct heirs of the attitude concerning first generation Indians. They are also more sensitive as to the role of women, their identity and the importance of their struggle to gain their own ground and break with all the expectations, stereotypes and demands made on them in social terms.

As the reader will have noticed above, the list of female writers does not include Manju Kapur, a writer living and working in India. Nevertheless, I will include some information from her two novels -*Difficult Daughters* (1998) and *A Married Woman* (2003) -although not in the same depth. The reason for having chosen Manju Kapur is twofold; first, the significance of her books, that seem to move in the same direction as the other authors written in England, and, second, the attempt to round off the main point in my research. In fact, as we will analyse in this dissertation the female characters

created by Meera Syal, Nisha Minhas, B.K. Mahal and Manju Kapur are characterised by the adoption of a critical and reflexive attitude that questions their parents' fate and, as a consequence, by the attempt to redefine cultural and social stereotypes and values in order to create a space of their own, which brings a redefinition of their identity as well as a controversy and confrontation due to the generation gap, the social context and a prevalent and powerful patriarchal ideology. Added to this, there is the suggestive meaning of the title of Kapur's novels, *Difficult Daughters* (1998) and *A Married Woman* (2003), both suggesting, in the first case, the tense relationship between mother and daughter from the moment the latter questions her mother's life, and in the second case, the hardships a married woman has to go through with a whole set of limitations on a social and cultural scale hidden below. All in all, hypothetically, they all point to a representation of conduct books regarding expected behaviour and, as will be observed in Chapter 4, to its transgression and desired negotiation.

All the writers are contemporary and they may still be publishing by the time this doctoral dissertation is finished and presented. During the elaboration of this dissertation there were three books waiting to be published: *Alentejo Blue*, by Monica Ali (2006), her second novel; *The Marriage Market* (2006), by Nisha Minhas, her fifth novel; and *Home* (2006), the third novel by Manju Kapur. Meera Syal's other works are only plays and as for B. K. Mahal it is her first novel and she is currently working on a sequel.

After some research on possible literature written on the authors, theses, essays, conferences and seminars, it is nothing but surprising that a worldwide institution like the British Council and its website *www.contemporarywriters.com* only include Meera Syal and Monica Ali within the list of contemporary writers in Great Britain. As to Meera Syal, they include some information on their biography, genres, bibliography, Prizes and awards and critical perspective. Under the heading bibliography I could only find her two novels and the book *Six Plays by Black and Asian Women Writers*, which includes *My Sister Wife* by Meera Syal by Aurora Metro Publications, 1995. No records were found about Nisha Minhas and B. K. Mahal on either of them.

As far as the academic reception is concerned Meera Syal's first novel *Anita and Me* found its way onto the school curriculum for 11 to 14 year-olds in England in 2007 as a recommended author together with Anita Desai and Benjamin Zephaniah and John Agard regarded as people from different cultures and traditions. As the writer states in an interview for *AIM* magazine (*AIM* 9.02.2007),

I hope my books give another version of the British experience and it shows that schools and colleges care about exposing young people to the many varying voices that are coming through from 2nd and 3rd generation writers.

Scholarly literature includes Davis (1999), Schoene-Harwood (1999), Donnell (2002), Marino (2003), Branach-Kallas (2004), Dunphy (2004), Banerjee (2007), Tofantsuk (2007), of which only the former concentrates on the works by Meera Syal. In the bibliography published recently on contemporary British literature (Davis 1999, Sauerberg 2001, Jandial 2003) no mention is found on B.K. Mahal, Nisha Minhas, Meera Syal, Manju Kapur; and in English (2006) no reference is made to Nisha Minhas or B.K. Mahal which is significant given the time of publication. No formal bibliography has been written on Minhas and B.K.Mahal.

A quick and curious look at the library catalogues from different universities leads to uneven results. In fact, the accessibility of the novels is, as occurred with the academic reception and the press, restricted to Meera Syal's books. The two novels by Meera Syal are recorded by the British Library, University College (London), Leicester University, Montfort University (Leicester), the University of Nottingham and Queenmary Westfield. The University of Derby only includes *Anita and Me* (1996), as well as the University of Leeds. *The Pocket Guide To Being An Indian Girl* can only be found at the British Library, Leicester University and Queenmary Westfield University. The list of Nisha Minhas' books are only recorded at the British library under the subject of love stories. The significance of the data lies in the still limited access to this new literature even in the students' academic world.

As to Manju Kapur, although she is not the main object of this study but useful in our approach to the analysis of the female characters, we find the following works: (Rollason 2008) and Gur Pyari Jandial (2003). In Spain, Dora Sales Salvador made an important contribution in 1998 and translated Manju Kapur's first novel under the title *Hijas Difíciles* (2003).

Within the press reception, a similar situation can be found with some newspaper articles on Meera Syal, mostly, and B.K Mahal but not on Nisha Minhas but for some article in the *Asian News* (2005) and her appearance in the list of Britain's leading South Asian women prepared by Mrs Lopa Patel, editor of *redhotcurry.com* in 2004 where paradoxically her position number was much higher than Meera Syal. Having been interviewed by the *Daily Telegraph* (2001, 2005) on several occasions, Meera Syal's work became the source of interest for the *New York Times* (Brantley 30.04.2004). She was referred to as a writer, actress and comedienne in 2001, as an actress and screenwriter in 2002 (*The Telegraph* 23.01.2002), as an actor and writer by the BBC in 2003 (Jones 2003); in 2005 she spoke about being "much on the inside, an Establishment figure, even: an MBE; a guest at Charles and Camilla's wedding (*The Telegraph* 18.04.2005). There has even been a South Bank Show about her (*The Telegraph* 2005). In an interview held with Zoe Williams for *The Guardian*, the journalist said of her,

I think of Meera Syal as a kind of Eddie Izzard. It would be easy to forget what she did for a living. Actor would probably come fourth or fifth, after novelist, scriptwriter, librettist, all-purpose purveyor of comedy" (*The Guardian* 18.04.2007)

In this interview she is also defined, together with her husband and comedy collaborator, Sanjeev Bhaskar, as "the king and queen of Asian comedy". She is a woman author of the British Asian community to achieve international recognition (Dunphy 2004 : 637), a second-generation member of the immigrant Indian community (ibid) included in "a busy decade of postcolonial London representations by such writers as Andrea Levi, Diran Adevayo, Bernardine Evaristo, Ferdinand Dennis, Atima Srivastava, Meera Syal, Alex Wheatle, Benjamin Zephaniah and others" (Mc Leod

2004: 162) and her writings have been approached as a kind of ethnic comedy (Tofantsuk 2007: 14).

As regards Nisha Minhas, although her name appeared in the Writer's conference at the University of Winchester as one of the authors represented by LBLA (Lorilla Belli Literary Agency), interested in first time novelists, journalists, multicultural and international writing and books about Italy, her reception in the press is limited. Writers like Meera Syal, B.K. Mahal, Manju Kapur or Hanif Kureishi are not listed; her weekly column in the *Asian Leader*, one of the most popular newspapers for the British Asian community; her appearance on BBC 2's DESI DNA arts show, no paper has been written on her in papers like *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph* or *The New York Tribute* as far as I have been able to discover in my research. In the newspaper article mentioned above she is referred to as simply an author while B.K. Mahal has been classified within the group of writers for children, together with Camila Gavin, Debjani Chatterjee and Bali Rai by Kalakahani, a Loughborough-based South Asian arts project. It invites fledgling writers based in the East Midlands to participate in a programme of activities to encourage and nurture their writing careers, funded by Arts Council East Midlands.

A possible explanation for the apparent lack of information on these British Asian born female writers could be that, in spite of their importance it is still a very recent phenomenon and although some researchers may be doing some research on the issue at hand it has not been published yet as I pointed out in Blasco (unpublished research paper 2004). In a conference held in London in September 2006 for ESSE 8 [European Society for the studies of English] by the University of London, Dr. Sebnem Toplu from EGE University delivered his paper "Conception of identity through difference". *The Role of Female Voices in Constructing Fictional Maps of Multicultural Britain* (co-convenor) and Giovanna Buonanno, from University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, presented a paper on "Visualizing Identity(ies) in the work of Meera Syal". As far as Dr. Sebnem Toplu informed me, although they are determined to publish the presentations in a book, the aim has not still been achieved and she is currently working

on a new abstract “Interconnectivity and Boundaries: Conception of Identity through difference in Preethi Nair’s *The colour of love* and *100 shades of white*”.

Some authors have published some works on gender and identity but they move in a direction distant from this thesis. Although I did not analyse them in detail the reader may like to approach them and know about what is being published. This would be the case of Dr. Antonia Navarro-Tejero from the Universidad de Córdoba. She focuses partly on issues of caste, gender, writers of the Hindu diaspora and Indian women activists; Dr. Manuela Palacios González, from the Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, deals, among other issues, with questions of translation and gender, and gender and nation in Irish women poets. Dr. Carmen Valero Garcés from the Universidad de Alcalá has published *Traducir (para) la interculturalidad: repertorio y retos de la literatura africana, india y árabe traducida*, though the book does not fully match our interests.

By the time my research paper was defended at the University of València, Nisha Minhas was getting her third book, *Passion and Poppadoms* (2004), published and B. K. Mahal her first and only book, *The Pocket Guide To Being An Indian Girl* (2004). It can also be due to the fact that in spite of the interest shown by minority associations like *Imaginasian* as well as others like *Salidaa* (see section 3.2.3.4.2), aimed at the promotion, knowledge and spread of the best books by Asian writers in Gujarati, Urdu, Punjabi and English in England, any researcher who tries to find some information on the authors reaches a few contradictory conclusions. In fact, the authors are not always the same and if we try to find names like Nisha Minhas, Manju Kapur or B. K. Mahal we do not get any satisfactory result although any citizen can buy their books. Contrary to this, Meera Syal’s social and cultural reception is far better known than the other authors probably due to her contribution to the media, both TV and the written press.

They have not received the attention they deserve by more socially and culturally influential institutions yet, what could be labelled as, if the reader lets me do so, a higher sphere. Furthermore it cannot be forgotten that the majority of mainstream

fiction aimed at women has been written by white middle-class authors.

Having reached this point a key question arises: what and who determines the scope through which these works should be considered as either better or worse than any other literary work in the publishing market? Two possible and reasonable answers could be globalization (Tomlinson 1999, Taberner c2004, Chadha 2006) and power although our aim is not to focus on such a complex and promising field. However, the dissertation could not proceed without taking the issue into account. Two of the consequences derived from globalisation² are the diffusion of national identities while other minority identities are being strengthened due to their opposition to globalisation, thus to the loss of their culture, and new hybrid identities are being created (see section 2.1.1 on Hanif Kureishi).

I am working on some books published recently; some of the literature written in contemporary England and as such we cannot forget that literature is a re-presentation of reality. Thus the writers are doing no more but show the reality as they see it or perceive it. They *present* the reality again giving it a new written form. Furthermore, the changes that both India, in terms of her moves towards modernity, and Great Britain due to her multiculturalism are going through, not only spread their voice in their countries but also in the international press. Therefore the changes experienced in India over the last years have provided the press with some of its most enriching material. In our case, a newspaper such as *La Vanguardia* echoed the continuous process of transformation. On 3rd September 2006 the journalist Xavier Ventura published an article under the title “La nueva religión de India” with the sub-heading “El dios Brahma, que creó el mundo y venció al demonio, no puede con la televisión”, focused on the impact of television in India over the last years to the detriment of religion and the old traditions. Not only is India highly influenced by a growing consumerism but also by the emergence of TV channels that teach Indian women the new role to be played in a country that is moving towards modernity. In fact, India is likely to emerge as the second largest consumer market in the world (Varma 2006: 1). With this note I try to provide the reader with some evidence, among thousands of other examples that

² For further information see Chadha (2006) and Taberner (c2004)

could be found in the media, on the transformation that the country is going through and as the starting point for a better understanding of the situation of women such as Kareena or Marina, the female characters in the books under analysis, who indirectly portray the situation of second generation women caught between two cultures and subject to the inner battle their situation involves. I will re-examine this point as the thesis develops.

Contemporary British society is characterised by a government that fosters multiculturalism. At the same time India formed part of the old British Empire so as such it is a direct heir of the British colonial power. Over the last years there has been an increasing concern and emphasis on the particularity of the different cultures that conform current British society. Huggan (2001: 67) considers the ambiguity and paradoxes played by multiculturalism in, as he states, “supporting social and cultural diversity within an increasingly dispersed political structure” as is Britain. Not only does multiculturalism require a different definition in different places but it has also been re-defined by the New Labour Party. On the one hand it moves towards modernization in the acceptance of the cultural and social diversity³ but on the other it does not erase the great bulk of social problems, racial discrimination being one of the most serious. As he also states, multiculturalism continues to have integrationist undertones; for the notion of unity-in-diversity, especially at a time of devolution, has a conservative ring to it, as racial discrimination is submerged beneath layers of political rhetoric and media spin (Broich 2001: 68).

Robert J. C. Young (1999) suggests that “British ethnic minorities have come to dominate the cultural self-representation of contemporary Britain. Or perhaps England. Arguably, multicultural identity is more English than British, in the sense that it is only the English (not the Welsh or Scots) that are represented as multicultural in this way. (Salman Rushdie and his hybridised post-colonial London, Hanif Kureishi, Kazuo

³ For more information see http://elt.britcoun.org.pl/elt/i_look.htm for *Looking for a New England*. British Studies Web Pages 2003. The United Kingdom's international organisation for educational opportunities and cultural relations.Identity.

Ishiguro, Timothy Mo, Sunetra Gupta, Grace Nichols, Caryl Phillips.)” (Galván and Bengoechea 1999: 27).

Having said this, an initial look at the primary bibliography pointed to some hypotheses. The literature produced by British-Asian female writers and the reminiscences in the British context of a hierarchical society like the Indian one, regardless of which religion, either Hinduism or Sikhism, in which women have been metaphorically chained and anchored to a strict social, cultural and sexual code of conduct lead to a hypothetical reading of the primary bibliography in the line of conduct books. Therefore, historically Indian women have been expected to comply with norms dictated by tradition and which moved beyond justification. The preservation of such norms in a context, the British in this case, with a whole set of different social and cultural order could be easily diluted and marked by complex gender relations based on a generation, race and ethnicity gap. Apparently the female characters could choose among resignation, and as such acceptance of the Indian way, rebellion, and as a consequence, refusal of their parents’ Indian heritage, and a position in between, and as such negotiation between the two heritages, rather different between them, one which is given and another inborn. This literature could even be interpreted as a contemporary version of a code of conduct transmitted through generations, time and place and that finds greater significance in the gender relations derived from the confrontation of diverse cultural and social ideologies with an emphasis on the multiculturalism and duality that characterises Britain today.

Last but not least, I cannot end this section without some evidence of the crucial role of India in contemporary Britain, the celebration of the 60th Anniversary of the Independence of India in 2007, and a cycle of Indian films at the BFI (British Film Institute) in the summer of the same year or the impact of both Asian and British-Asian music in particular, and the arts in general.

Method of work

As has been indicated in the introduction, the raw material is based on some works of the literature written in contemporary Britain by female writers with an Indian background but born in the West. The aim is to focus on them from the point of view of both discourse and gender identity. Gender identity includes the kind of relationships between the characters that arise in a very particular context and situation and the coexistence and survival within the limits and restrictions of a dual culture. All this is framed by the analysis of the books as what could be labelled conduct books; the way *British-Asian born* women are expected to behave even at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In order to do so, I will follow Armstrong and Tennenhouse's *The Ideology Of Conduct* (1987). Therefore, the primary bibliography attempts to reproduce and challenge culturally approved forms of desire within the Indian community and in clear opposition to the British society, in a way that, like conduct books, nurture prevails over nature and defends the idea that

Men and women can be *produced*. They are malleable, capable of being trained for changing roles; proper instruction can fashion them into successful participants in new social settings and the etiquettes belonging to them (Armstrong and Tennenhouse 1987: 41).

As Defoe defended in his conception of conduct books, "proper behavior must be learned, restraint that goes against fallen nature must be developed, but that behavior must also appear voluntary and "natural" (Armstrong and Tennehouse 1987: 74). In this line, the British-Asian female characters are required to avoid the seductions of the Western set of beliefs and values through the accomplishment of their expectations as members of the Indian community. However, what the books under analysis offer is a transgressive reading of the appropriate and desired woman to marry and a desired negotiation of cultural and social norms that allow the individual a major freedom and the prevalence of natural impulses defined beyond the canon of tradition.

What the primary bibliography will offer is information about the British-Asian woman's real state of mind - her expected behaviour and real feelings as a subject with her own aspirations in an evolving world she is having to cope with in a continuous

battle against externalised and codified behaviour. They stand as a representation of those conventions regulating sexual conduct against which its major characters seek to define themselves.

B. K.Mahal's work *The Pocket Guide To Being An Indian Girl* can be considered as a kind of manual as indicated in the title, however, and as the writer states in an interview for *The Telegraph*

Of course, by the end of my book - when Susham has broken all the rules - it is evident that there is no such thing as a pocket guide to being an Indian girl. 'Indian' is too much of a broad term - I could call you a white girl, but that doesn't give me any real information about you (*The Telegraph* 07/07/2004)

However, as I will try to show, these books could be considered as a representation of most of the key points present in conduct books that show a dual and complex reality in the sense that, in spite of the hardships found, the first generation still attempts to impose the dominant tradition in the Asian sub-continent on their siblings. As a result of this, they are expected to behave and act in a particular way and not in another both in the public and private space. Notwithstanding, the boundary between public and private is currently undergoing a process of redefinition and *public* renegotiation in our society (Harvey and Shalom 1997: 11).

In some cases I have considered it necessary to make reference to the *Laws of Manu* and the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the cannon law of Hinduism and Sikhism, respectively, as they constitute the basis of Hindu and Sikh culture, tradition and thought, in order to round off its relevance as regards Armstrong and Tennenhouse's contribution and the analysis of our primary bibliography. Some basic points of Sikhism have been seen in opposition to Hinduism as their perception of women, among others, is not regarded from the same perspective. Despite the structure of the thesis in clearly distinguishable parts, theoretical and practical, the complexity of the issue makes it unavoidable to provide the reader with some passages from the books under analysis where we included the theoretical background and vice versa in order to exemplify that which is expressed in more theoretical terms. In so doing it cannot be forgotten that in

studying the books partly through language “it is not how words are intended which determines their meaning, but the way they are understood” (Roy c1998: 32)

Although the titles of the books under analysis do not include the names of the main characters, they mainly focus on females and their circumstances. They refer to key issues such as identity, arranged marriage, the way the contrast between the East and West complicates the process of development of the inner self, or the fear not to comply with the expectations imposed on them. All of them have been written by women and their characters think about and reflect their own experiences as they are, with no shades of meaning and trying not to be manipulated by men’s *pre-conceptions* in a literary market where women’s voices has been silenced for years, mainly women from certain ethnic groups. There is the denunciation of the violation of themselves-women who question both their background and role in life. Nevertheless, we cannot forget, as has been highlighted above, that literature is a representation of reality and as such it presents reality in a particular way and with opposition from the older generations, any representation of reality responds to a particular ideology.

Therefore this thesis intends to reproduce a reality that moves beyond tradition; a journey that glides from the untouchable role of tradition towards the complex path of personal freedom and self-affirmation. On the one hand they reproduce socially and culturally approved forms of living and behaviour while on the other they show that other realities are also possible regardless of the hardships involved. Not only can human gender relations be given a different shade of meaning but they can also offer the reader a new way of adopting a critical opinion of an ever changing contemporary society. This fact does not imply the non-existence of contradictions but a whole set of paradoxes hard to solve. The complexity mentioned above is the result of the traditional conflict between the old and the new, within the traditional household a new perception of life and society will be introduced and will tumble the immediate surroundings and subverting the established norms. This dissertation is organised in four chapters. Very briefly, Chapter one is devoted to some theoretical considerations on the concept of gender in relation to identity, language and ideology. Thus, while gender is one of the most widely studied fields, this dissertation only approaches key notions on one of the

issues that concern us here, the analysis of the British-Asian female characters in England.

Chapter two initiates the reader on some theoretical data on traits that have defined and characterised Indian culture through generations. The basic pillars are constructed around tradition, the position of Indian women, the family, marriage, birth, religion, racism and prejudice and the conception of sex and sexuality. Surprising as it may seem they still define the cultural and social ideology of the members of the first generation directly, and more indirectly, on the second generation, of British-born individuals.

Chapter three focuses on the terminology used to refer to the literature written since the colonial period. With this, the aim is not to open a new field in literature but to regard it as an arena that has developed and that has had to adapt to the social demands of the increasingly representative role played by women writers first, and a multicultural society, second.

In Chapter four the discussion will be organised around selected passages from the primary bibliography and considering as the starting point for analysis and comparison the theoretical accounts from chapters one and two. With this, the thesis tries to provide a mirror with which to reflect part of today's British society and introduce the reader into the complexities and charms of a section of the population in a spectrum of change where social and cultural barriers are constantly under a process of definition. The need to respond to the new social and cultural demands has led to the growth of projects targeted at the knowledge and spread not only of British Asian writers but also of the other arts, mainly cinema and music. Finally, the dissertation concludes with some remarks and proposals for future study.

CHAPTER 1

SOME BASIC INTRODUCTORY NOTIONS ON GENDER

In this chapter I trace the interest in some theoretical assumptions on gender that will contribute to a better understanding of the different factors that constitute gender relations in a dual context. Thus I concentrate on the relationship between gender and identity, gender and language in its strategical perspective and language and ideology as the latter determines the treatment received by the different members of any community.

1.1 Introductory notes on gender

First of all it is worth saying that this study limits the approach to gender to the issues most closely concerned with the concept of conduct books, mainly ideology and identity, and linked to the former, power. The reason for this is that books on right and appropriate conduct have historically and traditionally been mostly addressed to women in the sphere of gender polarization and in the light of a patriarchal ideology that has placed women in a lower position to men. Both turned women into individuals subject to the man's power, either the father or the husband, and have established a power hierarchy maintained through time. In the case that concerns us here, British-Asian women in a multicultural society, the older generations' attempt in the preservation of tradition and the Indian way as the appropriate way is not only leading to social, personal and cultural confrontation but a new breath of air that emphasises, as we will observe, a gradual but significant move towards generational negotiation as represented by the primary bibliography.

Over the last few years when we first hear the word *gender* it may make us think of the differences between men and women at a time in which so many works on the issue at hand have been published. Not only is gender often thought of in terms of bipolar categories popularly, sometimes even as mutually exclusive opposites- as in "the opposite sex" (Talbot 2003: 26) but people are also perceived through a 'lens' of gender polarisation (Bem 1993: 26) and assigned to apparently natural categories .

The manipulation of the original word over the last years has produced a wide array of meanings. Thus, while in the beginning it was used to define grammatical concepts, now it refers mainly to the differences between the sexes in a time in which expressions like gender violence and gender identity have become commonplace in the media in Spain to refer to cases in which a man has raped, murdered or mistreated his wife. For Wallach Scott (1999: 66) “gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is primarily a way of signifying relationships of power”.

As Cameron puts it, “By gender I mean a social system which defines subjects as men and women and governs the relationships between them” (Cameron 2003: 202), and as such, it is “a form of social inequality, and many others can cut across it” (Graddol & Swan 1989: 132) as will be portrayed in family and social relationships in Chapter 4.

Because of the fact that the concept of gender involves the analysis of both groups, men and women, they cannot be separated; it would be pointless to talk about men without making any reference to women and the other way round in the view that “[g]ender differences are frequently represented as complementary” (Cameron 2003: 452). Such differences are the result of a social structure that emphasizes gender differences together with their social and cultural responsibilities. Other terms given to the sex/gender system have been mode of reproduction and patriarchy. (See Rubin 1975: 167)

As I will consider in Chapter 4 these gender differences are strengthened not only by the existence of castes and the roles assigned to the individual throughout their life span, marriage being the most significant social ceremony, but also the apparent impossibility of a sentimental relationship between individuals distant from each other not only in cultural but also in social class terms.

Some gender studies have been used to suggest that information about women is necessarily information about men, that the one implies the study of the other (Wallach Scott 1999: 59). Nevertheless gender cannot only be defined in terms of the men-

women polarity but in terms of the new emerging identities that the new generations are constructing and affirming in response to the social demands and which can be exemplified by the conception of stereotypes as a cultural category (Pichler 2007).

As I will analyse in the development of this thesis, the female characters subject to this study need both to affirm and construct their identity as a result of the pressures stemming from their parents, in the first place, and by their community in the second place. Regardless of the relative impact of Indian culture, their condition is different from both as British born citizens with a birth and an upbringing which is shaped in a British context. However, it is the insistence on the maintenance of their ancestors' original beliefs that make the female characters question not only their identity but also all the factors that form it mainly their personal choices and freedom which cannot be separated from the adoption of the proper behaviour and the correctness of actions in the name of family honour.

As I will try to show the rebellious behaviour of the characters responds to no more than a natural and inborn process of affirmation of the individual regardless of culture and race and the impossibility to renounce their British birth and upbringing on behalf of the old traditions imported from India (See sections 2.1.2, 2.3.5, 4.2.2.2). This emphasis on the relationship between gender and identity will take me to the next section, the link between gender and identity.

1.2 Gender and identity

First of all it is worth saying that gender refers to ways of seeing and representing people and situations based on sex difference (Goodman 1996: vii). By contrast, sex is a biological category, female and male. The former, gender, is a social and cultural category influenced by stereotypes about female and male behaviour that exist in the form of several attitudes and beliefs which are often said to be culturally produced or constructed. Simone de Beauvoir suggests in *The Second sex* that a woman is not born but becomes one. For her, gender is constructed, but implied in her

formulation as an agent, who somehow takes on or appropriates that gender and could, in principle, take on some other gender. Thus, woman itself is a term in process, a becoming, and a constructing that can not rightfully be said to originate or to end. As an ongoing discursive practice, (political, ideological, cultural, etc.) it is open to intervention and resignification (Butler 1990: 33). As we will see in the analysis of the different aspects concerning the Sikh and Hindu culture, the verb 'become' is a key concept in the definition and development of our identity. Thus, the latter is never finally defined but it is under a constant process of transformation and development. Such development depends on the different stages our personality goes through. If this process of transformation is significant within the same culture it takes a greater dimension in a context of culture clash in which the cultural and social ideologies are stronger. It is then that particular expectations arise.

The individual is caught in the continuous dichotomy between the personal needs and the institutional and social obligations and responsibilities. As to the family I would differentiate the role of the first generation family in Britain from the relatives in India and the existence of a fictitious double family, a British adopting family and an unknown mother in India as in *TDH* (2007). These communities are dominated by men, the social treatment of men and women is different, heterosexual love relations prevail and their gender roles always depend on the family on a particular level and on the community on a wider perspective.

At this point gender is not as polarised as might seem in the beginning- regardless of your gender the norms of behaviour have to be accomplished, either as a man or a woman. As we will see, these norms are not only transgressed but they provoke and determine the development of the individual. In this vein, Rubin's (1975 : 159) consideration of the sex/gender system as "the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which this transformed sexual needs are satisfied" matches the development of the new British identities currently emerging as a result of the British-Asian (Indian) duality that concerns us here.

In order for an institution to survive (and with this I mean the strict code dictated by both Hindu and Sikh culture and tradition) from generation to generation, certain traditions need to be, if not imposed, defended from within as section 4.2.4.2, *We Indian people*, shows in Chapter 4. Nevertheless, when such regulations are continuously threatened by external factors their pillars begin to fall down and, as concerns identity, a concept which involves lots of others, the new identities under formation, the British-Asian ones, sometimes referred to as simply British, enter into deeper conflict with the old regulations, identities and cultural/social expectations. The debate waves between the reformulation of tradition in a move towards the future, and the acceptance of a reality that is changing the individual's perception of what being either a Hindu or a Sikh, an Indian or British means.

This section cannot be finished without some notes on gender and sexuality as interwoven factors in the development of the individual, and as such of his/her identity. The latter is seen, in Cameron's words (2003: 202), as a "social system regulating the forms and the expression of erotic desire "and as sexual identity as we think cannot be separated in the process of identity formation. There is a particularly close relationship between gender and sexuality, and between gender identity and sexual identity, because each is part of the definition of the other, and each is part of the regulatory apparatus for the other (Cameron 2003: 202).

In this dissertation I will analyse the concepts of gender and identity together with expected behaviour. Now I propose to consider the connection between gender and language. As we will see in Chapter 4 its strategical value is key in gender relations and identity formation. Take the case of the first generation Indians that have not taught their native language to their offspring so that children cannot understand what is being said.

1.3 Gender and language

As has been pointed out before, I will analyse the novels by the authors chosen from the point of view of gender, language [discourse] and human relations. Although this section is less related to the paradigm of conduct books concerning proper conduct, its significance in the development of the characters is unquestionable regarding gender identity as will be observed below.

Language, says Lokugé (2000: 31), is one of the most important factors in cross-racial relationships and integration into a culture. It is through language that we express our feelings, (dis)establish social relationships and power relationships become apparent. Words show a specific ideology, they try to influence the listener or reader in a way or another, and they produce a certain reaction and come to a situation in which his/her goal is accomplished. The characters show certain beliefs, shared knowledge and social identities in spite of different views or as pointed out by Fairclough (1989:14) for whom “some words are ideologically contested”. The choice of certain words contributes to the establishment of specific relationships. In this vein, in the following quotation the polarity between a supposed identity, British, and a felt one, British West Indian becomes apparent through language to the detriment of the former through a direct reference to accent and manners about the correct way about how to eat chicken. During Sushi’s father’s stay at the allotment because of the conditions at her father’s ward, they meet George, who takes them to his patch of land,

‘Please Father, use a napkin.’

And Father George would cry out. ‘I am eating jerk chicken. A man from the heart of Jamaica does not use a napkin.’

‘You’re British now.’

‘Mi accent tell me otherwise and anyways I’m British West Indian, got that? Two things,’ he said sticking up two fingers at his son and Evelyn, ‘and you, my son, ain’t even one. Now shut your mouth and pass me a yam.’

(TPG 2004: 57)

Most of the conversations turn around the opposition to the old Indian traditions and discourse develops into a series of counterbalanced turns rather than cooperation, likeness and acceptance by the listener. In this vein, I agree with Weatherall and Gallois' (2003: 494) consideration of identity not as "something that people *are*. Rather, identity is something that people *do* during the business of everyday interaction". Therefore feedback is an inherent part of communicative interaction which makes the contributions of all participants continuously subject to the evaluation of their communicative and social partners. (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 2002: 40). It is essential to participants having a sense of belonging and shared identity. In this vein and as I will exemplify later "in communicative interaction people do not represent the world abstractly but in the course of and for the purposes of their social relations with others and their construction of social identities (ibid 41).

Chowdry looked to Zarleena for an answer to Joel's fluent Hindi, but Zarleena only shrugged. It was the first time in her life that a white man had introduced himself to her in her first language then asked her how she was. Bloody show off. She decided to raise the standard. Tusi bafiut sofiani Hindi bolde fio.

(*B and B* 2005: 162)

The same psychological approaches to language and gender identified by Weatherall and Callois (2003: 487) can be applied to the female literature that concerns us here. On the one hand, gender is seen as the internalisation of norms about how to speak and act. On the other hand, discursive psychology considers language as "the prime site for understanding social conduct", mainly in oral communication. According to psychologists, the social cognitive approach to gender identity regards language as both a medium for expressing gender identity and a reflection of it (Weatherall and Gallois 2003: 489). Therefore the way people think and behave depends on the social group to which they belong and the way they compare with other groups (always more adaptation depending on inferiority, superiority, interest). People have one internalised gender identity and our speech is related to that identity which responds to a monolithic vision of Hindu tradition.

The functions ascribed to language are of a diverse nature. Thus, not only is the role played by language dependent on the situation, take the case of the parents using their native language so that their children cannot understand what is being said as they have not learnt the language. As a mode of example, it was when Meena's father talked to his wife in Punjabi and not in English, he

[...] talked to her in Punjabi, which I knew was a sign that something was secret and therefore, bad news.

(AM 1996: 25)

Language also plays a strategic role linked to sexuality and women as considered in

Swearing in English was considered more genteel than any of the Punjabi expletives which always mentioned the bodily parts of one's mothers or sisters, too taboo to sit on a woman's lips.

(AM 1996: 25)

Language users not only form mental models of the situation they interact in, but also of the events or situations they speak or write about. (Wodak and Meyer 2001: 111). To illustrate the truth of this I can take an example from B. K. Mahal's book in which Susham and his brother Budgie make gender a conversation issue unconsciously and which turns into an instance of metaliterature. Thus while Budgie is watching a cricket match in which India is heading for their highest test score against Australia, and to his misbelief, the two brothers argue on Susham's desire to watch the programme and which develops as follows:

`What ya doing?' asked Budgie, frowning.

`Same as you.'

`Watching cricket?'

`Yeah, why?' I asked.

`Girls don't match cricket.'

`Well, don't consider me a girl, then,' I told him – a simple solution to this

problem.

‘I don’t.’

(TPG 2004: 3)

These words are, as Wodak and Meyer claim, an example of the mental model of the interaction situation. The speakers turn a daily event into a representation of the stereotypes and code of conduct expected of a woman at the same time that literature is converted into the fictional re-presentation of a longer conduct book. In the same line, and in this case concerning marriage, in a close up of Sunita in Tania’s film on the Asian community in *Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (1999) that she recognizes the main problem in her marriage was communication.

Men tend to ignore the problems and hope they will go away. (...) Women are more eager to talk, but first they have to be listened to.

(LHH 1999: 177)

Women’s complaint on the fact of not being listened to by their husbands points to the fact that “the act of giving information by definition frames one in a position of higher status, while the act of listening frames one as lower” (Tannen 1990: 139). In a culture characterised by its restrictions and where the position of women has always been below that of men, a way of exercising greater control over her is through the lack of interest in what they think or say. However, this gender polarization can be analysed not in terms of power, which is also true, but also in terms of sociolinguistic subcultures following Maltz and Borker’s (1990: 200) terminology. As the authors argue,

American men and women come from different sociolinguistic subcultures, having learned to do different things with words in a conversation, so that when they attempt to carry on conversations with one another, even if both parties are attempting to treat one another as equals, cultural miscommunication.

In the case that concerns us here the two subcultures would be constituted by the British-Asian male and females as holders of different discourses despite a common upbringing in the Indian way, yielding different results beyond expected behaviour due

to the experiences lived. Not only do they speak a different language regarding their aim in life, desired conduct expectations and interpersonal relationships but they adopt a new discourse on the character of the white man, and with this, a different ethnicity, but also a new language that shows assertiveness and confidence as a defence and expression of the security and reliance of the character's thoughts. These traits will allow, as we will observe, a renegotiation of gender roles and expectations in which most of the female characters will move in the go-between direction. While these differences highlight interethnic communication, cultural miscommunication would rise in the interaction between the members of the two cultures mainly caused, as shown in the passages from Chapter 4, in the lack of real knowledge of the other culture, false stereotypes and the attraction between two completely opposed personalities.

Nevertheless, and whatever the case, in any approach to gender and its place in a particular society ideology becomes crucial as far as the perception of the concept varies.

1.4 Gender and ideology

I propose to consider first that by ideology I mean the system of beliefs by which we not only justify and explain our behaviour but also the behaviour of others. The more restricting a society is, the stronger the ideological burden and the moral and social responsibilities of the individual. Thus, as a "social construct" (Cameron 2003: 448) not only does it entail the strengthening of some norms to the detriment of others but also a particular relationship between the individual and his most immediate surrounding. According to Easthope (1991: 131), as an expression of social power, ideology can be understood in terms of sociology of knowledge, that is, ideology always conforms to the interests of those from whom it comes so that what you think or say depends in part on who you are and where you are when you're saying it. "Ideologies in institutions through which the state articulates with the population it governs are particularly powerful" (Philips 2003: 272). As she also points out "Gender ideologies are used to interpret and motivate behaviour and are enacted in socially meaningful

behaviour. But there is no such thing as a clear one-to-one relation between one gender ideology and one society. Instead there are multiple gender ideologies in all societies.” (*ibid* 272)

The ideology of gender leads women to a gap in a patriarchal society, like the Indian one in our thesis, a gap that mostly begins on the day the future couple will be introduced, a day which is regarded as judgement day and in which the role of the future mother-in-law and sister-in-law is defined as judges and the most important question “Would she do as she was told?” (*Ch or Ch* 2000: 27),

Naina was reminded of the rules she must follow to impress her future husband, Ashok. They were: keep quiet until spoken to, smile, best of manners, do not laugh, do not cry, and if in doubt, look at the floor until spoken to again. Naina was sure she should be looking at an awful amount of floor today.

(*Ch or Ch* 2000: 27)

It stands as a perfect example of literary representation of conduct books as is the passage below. As is shown in the quotation above, Naina has been brought up as a *good Indian girl* despite her British birth and surrounding, and as a consequence, with a whole set of rules as regards her behaviour in different situations. The passage above, about the first meeting with her husband-to-be, portrays not only the harshness of the social and familiar consideration of the individual, which is barely null, but also the sadness in the awareness of the female reality because of the ignorance she will have to suffer and go through. As she says she will spend most of the time looking at the floor as she is aware of the fact she will be ignored and nobody will show any interest in her beyond the importance of the agreement to be reached by the two families as regards marriage in order to succumb tradition.

On their first night together and after Kareena’s fall because of a rocky bed, a comical scene portrays women’s inferiority, submission and gender difference, factors which constitute the harsh moral code under which they live:

‘You’re full of crap.’ Quickly she covered her mouth. ‘Whoops, sorry, I shouldn’t say that. Sorry.’ Kareena lowered her head in shame. This was no way to talk to her husband. Her mother had warned her to think rude things in Punjabi but to say only nice things in English. Never, ever, degrade your husband. She frowned. ‘I’m really sorry.’

(S and S 2003: 41)

Kareena’s reaction with an apology and the lowering of her head in shame are no more than the result of a strict code of behaviour imposed from birth she has to comply with and in case of transgression has to be immediately repaired because of the weight of tradition. In the same line, the language opposition between Punjabi and English leads to the character’s consciousness about the language used without place for naturalness and spontaneity and, with this, an identity conflict which generates specific gender relations. Here, and as a complement of the instances highlighted in the previous section, the language will place the woman in a higher or lower position regarding her husband and will determine, thus, her social and cultural position in the community.

Added to that, there is the significant role played by *language ideologies*, that is, the “sets of *representations* through which language is imbued with cultural meaning for a certain community” (Cameron 2003: 447). On the one hand, they are characterised by their symbolic dimension as they go beyond language by itself but highlight its hidden meanings and the expression of the values and beliefs of the cultural code to which they belong. On the other hand, ideologies of gender and language evolve through time and space and they develop into new representations in their application to class and ethnicity. Indian women, and by extension British-Asian women, are not expected to react against their Indian heritage, to act following Western patterns or to speak with confidence and security (See S and S 2003: 274-7). And this is reflected in language not only with their words but also with comments on the way their words are uttered or their movements made in conversation as in stated in *Saris and Sins* (20003).

Most Indian girls learn to bite their tongues from an early age. They become very articulate when keeping quiet and can keep a whole conversation going with itsy-bitsy motioning gestures of the head, tiny flicks of the eyebrows

and faint twinkles in their eyes. Without knowing it, the Indian way has made them experts in flirting and masters of containing their opinion.

(*S and S* 2003: 353)

This quotation not only supports the submissive and quiet role of women as a result of the existing ideology and code of conduct but also a whole set of rules that lay beneath a millenary tradition resistant to a dual context and passing time. In some cases the lack of knowledge of other cultures, behaviours and/or situations turn women into victims of a supposedly correct moral code as shown in the latest publications.

What remains to be said in this chapter is that all the factors affecting gender mentioned above cannot be worked on in isolation but in relation to the different elements that create conformity Indian culture. Concepts like social structure, new emerging identities, stereotypes as a cultural category cannot be approached on their own but become the cause and effect of any complex society which strives to overcome the opposition between the old and the new and that requires a constant social and cultural redefinition. Most of the times they will result in overlapping.

In the next chapter, I will outline some key issues that have defined and characterised Hindu culture through time and different locations in order to analyse them in greater detail in Chapter 4. The traits included have not been chosen at random but respond to the issues that cause a major personal, social and cultural clash due to the coexistence of two, if the reader lets me say so, polarised systems. Consequently, the attempt to preserve the Indian way in a British multicultural context will inevitably confront different attitudes and ideologies, and with this, different perceptions on expected behaviour and thus with the conduct rules that have outlined the conduct of Indian women, more specifically, and women in general as has been the concern of books of conduct for centuries. Therefore throughout history conduct books have kept their function as regulators of the individual's life in terms of, among others, identity, marriage, sexuality and roles and which restrict freedom and independence.

CHAPTER 2

INDIAN CULTURE: IDENTITIES, STEREOTYPES AND PREJUDICES

This chapter focuses on Indian culture with a strong emphasis on the different factors that shape the development of the individual, and more specifically, of the female characters that concern us here. In order to better understand the complexity of Indian culture and the first generation struggle to keep it alive in their descendants I will begin with some of the key issues on Indian culture like tradition, and within this the role of women, the place of the family and the community, marriage, religion, racism, stereotypes together with other issues related to them in a more or less direct way. Then I will move on to the notion of identity in its different shapes and the arrival of the first generation to Britain in the 40s, 50s and 60s in order to ease the understanding of the position of parents in the duty to comply with a social and moral code in an adversarial context like the British one in the preservation of their cultural heritage, and which is outlined in the different sections. In this analysis two issues arise. First, all these concerns will contribute to a better understanding of the primary bibliography which is not free from the complexity that characterises Indian culture both within and beyond the subcontinent. Second, they are framed within the context of a personal perception of the possibility to read the primary bibliography as conduct books.

2.1 Indian culture

2.1.1 Tradition

If something characterises Indian culture it is its attachment to tradition and, with this, a strict code of conduct. Nevertheless, and contrary to what might seem, the Indians offer justifications for most of the conducts judged as inappropriate. As to tradition, the English sociologist Anthony Giddens (1990: 37-38) defends that,

In traditional societies, the past is honoured and symbols are valued because they contain and perpetuate the experience of generations. Tradition is a way of handling time and space, which inserts any particular activity or experience within the continuity of past, present and future, these in turn being structured by recurrent social practices.

As regards conduct, the existence of freedom of conduct does not, however, imply that all behaviour is regarded equally. Each community shows a different code of conduct and each will determine a particular hierarchy and social consideration. The individual can behave in a particular way but he will also be judged by the members of his community.

One of the most relevant features of Indian society, commented upon by Enterría (2007) is said to be the lack of distance between public and private life and with this the lack of privacy. As a consequence any event is commented upon and discussed, and although a member of their community is highly criticised he is accepted as such in the end. I do not entirely agree with this last statement as far as the primary bibliography is concerned. In fact, as I will analyse later on, mainly among the most traditional families, even in England, a woman who goes against tradition is disowned and looked down on despite the fact that this traditional view is being gradually replaced by a more modern perspective. The complexity and double perspective maintained above can be exemplified in the following quotation although the issue will be considered in greater detail in Chapter 4:

When an Indian woman sees another Indian woman who has gone against the system, who has flouted the Indian way, inside they secretly admire her and enviously imagine what being free would be like. Inside they question themselves: why did I have to be born Indian? But outside they keep up the facade, they pretend life is good and they shrug off words like `love`, `happiness` and `freedom`.

(TDH 2007: 251)

Thus, while a rebellious Indian woman is punished by her community the other members of her gender encounter two polarised feelings of sympathy and repulsion together with envy for the lack of courage to do the same and live their lives according to their own code of conduct and freedom. As British Asian born women they are not permitted any blurry territory but to live a life in accordance with the Indian code to the exclusion of the British way.

2.1.2 Indian women

First of all it is crucial to clarify that in this section I refer to Indian women as I am settling some of the features that define Indian culture as the model to be followed without any consideration as to women born in England from Indian parents. After having established these features, I will compare them to the situation of British-Asian women, thus British born individuals from Indian parents in order to better understand the gender conflicts generated in a dual context as indicated in the previous chapter. It is a commonplace that no approach to British-Asian women, or any other, can be accomplished without bearing in mind some basic points for its understanding. It is a fact that they live under a process of crisis and transformation; a crisis of self-identity mainly caused by the division between her own self and that of the others.

Yuval Davis (1998: 177) emphasises the role of women as biological and cultural national reproducers, as cultural embodiments of collectivities and their boundaries; as carriers of collective honour and as participants in national and ethnic struggles; they are also marked by their self-sacrifice and martyrdom in love and men's dominated heterosexuality.

What has been determined by women in the private domain determines their reception in the public sphere. On the one hand, they are necessary as members and representatives of their ethnic group but on the other they receive a different treatment as to legal and social regulations. This inequality of the sexes is ancient. Already Aristotle saw the relationship between husband and wife as political and as one of authority contrary to the relationship with the children, which was considered as royal because it was based "on affection and seniority" (Foucault 1987: 216).

The situation of women in India has always been contradictory. On the one hand, Indian women are deprived of their freedom but, on the other, they are regarded as a symbol of energy and prosperity. In a traditional culture like the Indian one in which the supremacy in any field is dominated by patriarchy it is not surprising that the

main role of the woman is as a mother and her most important relationship, above any other possible relationship, is the mother-son tie, even after marriage.

As a result of the weight of tradition not only do they have to respond to a strict code of conduct but they are also expected to perform a larger number of duties than men with the subsequent restriction of personal freedom. We must not forget that the life of an Indian is tied to their family and, as a consequence, his life is only understood within the family as a whole and individuality is not understood. It is probably due to the Indian women's capacity for self-sacrifice, strictness and discipline derived from culture that they grow and develop as stronger human beings, able to overcome any adverse situation. As I will examine in section 4.2.6, although women have been expected to be quiet and timid through history, as also applies to the culture under study, their personality will experience a gradual change of emotional and self strength that will also modify gender relationships for their own good. Even men, as Álvaro Enterría (2006: 300) defends, men are aware of women's strength. Mothers are regarded as the first teachers for their descendants, they are the transmitters of tradition and one of their duties is the transmission of Indian mythology and rituals to their descendants. Nevertheless, most of them also become the victims of the clash between contemporary education and the conduct code imposed on them.

On the other side of the coin, and mostly in opposition to what has been stated above, the birth of a woman may become a cause of concern in poor Indian families. In fact one of the men's responsibilities is economic support. This is one of the reasons for the prohibition of letting an Indian woman know about their baby's sex before birth and avoid abortion as is the case in England as is the case in *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (1999) before the birth of Chila's baby. It is considered that women cannot provide the economic support needed in an Indian household.

These paradoxes stand as an example of the controversy, diversity and contradictions embraced by the Indian culture and society and I will concentrate on these in the books under study which are no more than the portrayal of all this complexity and the difficulty of setting a unified and coherent line of thought both in

India and the United Kingdom. Nevertheless it is these paradoxes and contradictions that turn the, for practical reasons, the British-Asian culture into the most enchanting field, a panorama which is also found among the Sikhs.

Having reached this point and in order to better understand the Sikh and the Hindu codes it is necessary to refer to some points collected in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the primary scripture of the Sikhs and the so-called *Laws of Manu*, the canon law of Hinduism concerning women.

As far as Sikhism is concerned, historically, the status of women has not been the same. Contrary to their inferior status the *Guru* outlines their equality to men. However, in spite of the change in the conception of women, their portrayal in B.K. Mahal is far from certain. Therefore they do not hold a clearly defined status. Not only do Indian girls become known to the general public if they are landed a role in an Indian flick, had a forced marriage¹ or run away but they are also regarded as a burden.

The daughters [when she refers to over-protective, over-burdening and over-annoying Indian mothers], the donkey of the family, has to carry the burden, but also she is the donkey she is also the honour. (Note to myself: I sound bitter. Another note to myself: I am) (...) Because of this-us the unfortunate, and then the doted-on-there is created a cold war between the sexes, I guess. You don't know when it happened but you know that Rule Number 4: Never forget that you are a lesser human being than your brother.

(TPG 2004: 13)

A passage that focuses on the individuals' consciousness on the differences between the sexes and the contradictions in the paradoxical role to be played by women, assumptions they are born with.

¹ Tony Blair wrote an open letter to various Asian women groups to offer his support on legislation around forced marriages in 2007. To read the letter, see Appendix 2.

In chapter 1 I highlighted an example of metalanguage on gender concerning a distant gender identity; in *TPG* (2004) while watching a cricket match, Susham and her brother make gender a conversation issue unconsciously in which she asks him not to consider her a girl if it involves not watching a cricket match for not being a man. Now the instance highlighted above stands as an example of the direct consciousness of gender difference fostered by cultural oppression and the different gender ideology. The fact described in Rule 4 creates distance rather than closeness between the two and alludes to the family power hierarchy according to which the parents are over the children, the father over the mother and the brothers over the sisters in spite of the difficulty of acceptance of such a status mainly as this structure is broken in the Hindu culture because of the influence of the older generations.

In the *Guru Granth Sahib*,

From the woman is our birth; in the woman's womb are we shaped
To the woman are we engaged; to the woman are we wedded.
The woman is our friend, and from the woman is the family.
If one woman dies, we seek another; through the woman are the bonds
of the world.
Why call woman evil who gives birth to kings and all?
From the woman is the woman; without the woman there is none;
Nanak: Without the woman is the One True Lord alone. (AG, p. 473)

As we will see most of the pillars of the two religions will tumble and will gradually fade away in the British context.

2.1.3 Family

The individual's identity is not conceived without the family. As Álvaro Enterría (2006: 279) claims

El individuo aislado, que tiende a ser cada vez más el prototipo en las sociedades occidentales, es visto en la India como una pieza separada del todo, el último estadio del egoísmo y el aislamiento.

In fact the differences between the traditional Asian family and the Western family in the construction of family as a concept and the role of the individual within the family are numerous. The family is not united by the same boundary as the nuclear family unit, rather it tends to encompass grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins and relationships are hierarchical not only between the sexes but also between the generations.

The father or elder brother makes important decisions for the whole extended family even if members are widely separated geographically (Abercrombie 1994: 52) (the author focuses on Pakistan although the situation coincides with India as we will analyse in section 4.2.2.2). Nevertheless, as Walvin (1994: 150) points out concerning immigrants,

It becomes progressively more difficult to maintain the attachment to the homeland with the passage of time and as new generations grow up with less secure roots in their parents' home lands.

As a consequence, the joint family system, which represents the emotional stability of the family, is in a crisis, even in India with the population having to move far from their birth places because of the need to work. Thus, families will need to be located along a continuum between the traditional, hierarchical family with adherence to extended family values and the Western, contemporary, egalitarian family.

2.1.3.1 *Role of the parents*

2.1.3.1.1 Who wants to understand parents?

This question responds to one of the universal concerns in any society regardless of culture. Therefore traces of the opposition to parents are evident from the beginning not only in British Asian female characters but also in Kapur's novels. The latter writer's portrayal of the relationship between mothers and daughters matches the prevalent idea in the literature being written in England by British Asian female writers

over the last years and that become the target of this thesis. The beginning of the novel *Difficult Daughters* (1998) is as follows,

The only thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother.

(DD 1998: 1)

The author shows a mother's life devoted to her husband and "breeding like cats and dogs" (DD 1998: 7) although

The competent adolescent will have a behavioural repertoire that includes respectful behaviour to one's elders, and strategies for gender diffusion and conflict avoidance within the immediate and wider family (Lau 2000: 39).

the external circumstances will lead to conflict. The situation taken to the extreme might imply, as Nice (1992: 9) accentuates, that "for womanhood, the ultimate paradox must be the need to deny our mothers in order to affirm ourselves."

The role of the Indian parents is focused on the proper education of their offspring as regards the achievement of arranged marriage at the appropriate time and with a member of the proper couple. In the *Laws of Manu* an explicit reference is made to this point. Thus, "reprehensible is the father who gives not (his daughter in marriage) at the proper time; reprehensible is the husband who approaches not (his wife in due season), and reprehensible is the son who does not protect his mother after her husband has died" (Rule 4, chapter 9). In Sikhism, as regards the respect of parents, the following quotation can be read,

Son, why do you quarrel with your father,
Due to him you have grown to this age?
It is a sin to argue with him.
GURU IV, SARANG RAG ²

² For more information See <<http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/quotations/>>

As we will see in the books under analysis, such respect and acceptance of tradition as dictated by the Hindu and Sikh canon law will lead to confrontation. Not only will the pillars of tradition be diffused but also the coexistence of the two communities, the British and the Indian ones, will require a redefinition in order to overcome cultural and racial barriers. In this process, and as a main point in the relationship between the members of the first and the second generation, the image that mothers can have of their daughters may be confusing; a cluster of experiences that only fit within the established system and that crash into other realities which are not so clearly structured and uprooted in tradition; a term that is continuously repeated as can be seen in 4.2.2, 4.2.3, 4.2.8, 4.2.11, 4.2.12 in the analytic approach in the primary bibliography.

2.1.3.1.2 Daughters as selling products

First of all it is worth saying that the role of women has been subject to different interpretations in the *Vedas* and uniformity within the same text cannot be confirmed. Although the Indian constitution guarantees equal rights to both sexes, equality does not exist. The oldest book, the *Vedas*, contains condemnable passages concerning women. Thus,

- Daughters are unwanted. Thus while the birth of a son is celebrated, the daughter is repudiated.
- There cannot be any friendship with women.
- They are devoid of energy.
- A slave girl was called “Vadhu” (wife) with whom sexual intercourse could be performed without any kind of marriage ceremony. The girls belonged to the men who snatched them from the enemies, or who had received them in dowry or as gifts.
- There existed the custom of polygamy aimed at bringing down the women.

The case that concerns us here, the conception of the woman as property goes back to *Atharva Veda* (14/1), a sacred text of Hinduism, and one of the four Vedas, often called the fourth Veda composed at the end of 2nd millennium BC, “Oh Ye Men! Sow your seeds in the fertile field i. e., woman!” (In time before Manu). Thus, the imposition by Hindu culture could be interpreted following Lévi-Strauss’ vision of women as exchange, “biological and social point of view: women as an element of exchange to preserve the conventions of one’s own culture”. (Lévi-Strauss 1969, Sahlins 1972, Rubin 1975). This conception is not new in time as in Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Women* the author referred to the treatment given to daughters as objects in hands of fathers and husbands without any consideration for the desires of the individual. This conception can be found in *Chapatti or Chips* (2000), *Passion and Poppadoms* (2004), *The Marriage Market* (2006) in Chapter 4. Thus it becomes part of a tradition that continues being written even in the twenty-first century

This view of the woman is closely related to dowry. In Indian culture through dowry the daughter was given away as a gift to the future husband and parents were forced to pay a high price to marry off girls to men of higher status. Indeed one of the factors to be considered for marriage together with the looks of the girl was the status of the family. As Sushi states after her sister’s wedding and during the first encounter between the two families,

I don’t know why she was so excited, ’cos she wasn’t getting any of it, but I suppose she must have been pleased that her daughter had landed in the lap of luxury, even though most of it was insipid-looking.

(TPG 2004: 207)

A criticism of the apparent happiness of Indian families. Having reached this point it is necessary to approach the conception and role of the husband in Indian culture.

2.1.3.2 Role of the husband

According to the *Laws of Manu*, women must be honoured and adorned by their fathers, brothers, husbands, and brothers-in-law, who desire (their own) welfare (rule 55, chapter 3); in that family, where the husband is pleased with his wife and the wife with her husband, happiness will assuredly be lasting (rule 60, chapter 3).

Though destitute of virtue, or seeking pleasure (elsewhere), or devoid of good qualities, (yet) a husband must be constantly worshipped as a god by a faithful wife (Rule 154, chapter 5). By violating her duty towards her husband, a wife is disgraced in this world, (after death) she enters the womb of a jackal, and is tormented by diseases (the punishment of) her sin (Rule 164, chapter 5). Considering that the highest duty of all castes, even weak husbands (must) strive to guard their wives (Rules 6, 7 chapter 9) he who carefully guards his wife, preserves (the purity of) his offspring, virtuous conduct, his family, himself, and his (means of acquiring) merit.

Women must particularly be guarded against evil inclinations, however trifling [they may appear]; for, if they are not guarded, they will bring sorrow on two families (Rule 5: Chapter 9).

The Indian male as husband is often confronted with the need to resolve the psychological as well as social role of being a son. At best he ends up establishing the bio-social role of a husband, but rarely fulfils the psychological one. The man is often unable to take any initiative to create psychological togetherness. Love, affection and all the other softer feelings often tend to be expressed only in the form of the sexual act (...) The man discovers that the only socially approved alternative available to him is to get over- involved in work or in other settings of the masculine world (Parikh 1989 : 150).

In *Saris and Sins* (2003) the difficulty of filling the gap between the social and the psychological duties as an Indian Sikh, Samir, leads to infidelity and lying to his wife and so to a code of conduct totally prohibited in his culture.

2.1.4 Marriage as a social institution in India

Going back in history, and as indicated by Suzanne Hull (c1982: 47) “married women were chattels in sixteenth and seventeenth century England”. They were subject to their husbands and their aim in life was “to be suitably married” (Hull c1982 : 48). Because this, sometimes imposed condition, was highly dependent on law, religion and tradition, most written books were initially directed towards men. They had to know how to educate women, which takes us back to proper conduct.

As in the Hindu and Sikh tradition, marriages were also arranged by parents; they had the responsibility to find a suitable husband for their descendants. With this I am trying not only to place the books in a context that although in a different period of time, are very close ideologically, but also trying to get some understanding of their importance as a transmitter of a tradition which is still constantly repeated through the centuries. The significance of tradition and its attribution of gender roles can be seen in the celebration of the Sikh wedding ceremony where the groom is told to be the protector of the bride’s person and honour and the bride the master of all love and respect.

Over the last years the choice of a partner is not so dependent on the parents but on other solutions. Armin was found by networking,

[...] a friend of a friend of a cousin knew of him and everything about Armin seemed perfect.

(*B and B* 2005: 97)

What seemed to be the perfect husband on the day of the introduction,

He was the perfect gentleman, with the looks of a Bollywood film star, the manners of a prince and a family background that was squeaky clean. On paper he was fantastic, in the flesh just sensational. No wonder agreement to the wedding was almost instantaneous.

(*B and B* 2005: 142)

turns out to be a man missing in “love and caring for his woman” (*B and B* 2005: 5) whose response to the submission to tradition takes the form of beating his wife, makes continuous threats to his wife and finds an unexpected adversary in the form of a white man, Joel, willing to protect and love her without fear of failure, and is a man unable to stand the personal and economic independence and success achieved by a woman traditionally expected to depend and be subject to her husband. Nevertheless, I will re-examine this issue in Chapter 4.

In section 4.2.11.1 I already highlighted the good qualities needed in order to be considered the appropriate candidate as an Indian husband, the correct age, caste, well thought of family and one who mixed in the right circles. Contrary to these good qualities the current trend does not move in exactly the same direction. As has been considered in a survey carried out by the newspaper *India Today*, nowadays Indian women are interested in a good boy from a good family, with matching caste and horoscope and reeled off her priorities: “He has to be smart, sensible, sincere, sensitive and qualified enough to lead a better life” (*India Today*, 13.3.2008).

This line of thinking is caused by the influence of the internet and the advantages it offers as far as the choice of partner is concerned as well as the increase in the number of matrimonial websites available which move beyond traditional chains. This has not only led to a redefinition of one of the pillars of Indian tradition, marriage, but it has also brought a deep social change in both India and Great Britain.

Nevertheless, the psychologist-counsellor with Nriyjanjali in Mumbai, Tushar Guha’ (*India Today*, 13.3.2008) holds,

But scratch below the surface, 60 per cent of the youth are still mama’s boys or papa’s girls. They have just become smarter about choosing their partners. In a recent shaadi.com survey, 80 per cent young people said they would not marry without parental blessings, as mentioned in the same newspaper.

2.1.4.1 Castes

The aim of this section is not to analyse the caste system deeply in India but to refer to some issues that may ease its understanding in our work on Hindu marriage. To start with it is worth considering that a caste is a group in which one is born and within which one must marry. Within each caste you have to behave in a particular way and you lose your caste if you marry a person violating the rules of that caste. Contrary to Hinduism, for which castes divide people, *Guru Nanak* prays equality and brotherhood in an attempt to ease communication. The existence of castes has not been due to the presence and action of god but it is man-made. As Pavan K. Varma (2006: 19) indicated the caste system shifted from being a functional characterization to becoming “one of the most inflexible and istituzionallized tyrannies of any society”. In spite of its loss of strength in contempportary society, “the mentality of a stratified society remains very much in evidence in everyday life” (Varma 2006: 19).

2.1.4.2 At marriage value

In his work *Homo hierarchicus: the caste system and its implications*, Louis Dumont (1981: 110) considers the immense social relevance of marriage, being the most important ceremony, and highlights it as the most prestigious family ceremony. Thus, marriage

- constitutes the main occasion on which the greatest number of members of the caste and other persons gather together.
- it is the most expensive ceremony.
- it is strictly codified to keep lineage for each caste, certain customs having the value of positive hierarchical criteria, like infant marriage, prohibition of remarriage of widows and ever the absence of divorce.

For the Hindus, the first marriage is the real one; it is indissoluble and is called *primary marriage*. In case of widowhood or divorce, there is the possibility of a second

marriage, called *secondary marriage*, regarded as an inferior marriage and can be freer. Given the lack of a secondary marriage there exists the *quasi-levirat* between the widow and the younger brother of her husband. In a submissive society like the Indian the choice of a partner from the same caste guarantees common ritual and cultural traditions.

It is also important to differentiate between arranged marriage and forced marriage. Arranged marriage is entered freely by two people in spite of the parents' insistence on the choice of a good partner. However, forced marriage is an abuse of human rights and a form of domestic violence.

The British Parliament has recently been working on the passing of a law for the abolition of the latter although the law will only apply to England and Wales. Until such a law there was no law expressly prohibiting forced marriage in the UK. Although it is considered a crime in countries like Pakistan, India and Norway, no country has tailored statutory remedies for victims. The Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Bill was introduced in the House of Lords on 16th November 2006. The law is not regarded as a panacea but it can influence anti-social attitudes and behaviour stemming from cultural practices. The cruelty and violence suffered by young adults and children by forcing them into marriage has been recently dealt with by Jasvinder Sanghera in her book *Shame* published in January 2007.

As to Sikh marriage, it is called Anand Karaj. Being introduced from the time of the Sikh Gurus it was given statutory recognition during the British rule in India by the Anand Marriage Act 1909.

- All Hindu superstitions about good or bad days and rituals before, during and after marriage are strictly forbidden.
- Sikhs practise monogamy.
- Persons not professing the Sikh faith cannot be joined in wedlock by the Anand Karai ceremony.
- Widows or widowers may remarry.

- While husband and wife roles are regarded as complementary (and despite erosion of certain Sikh values due to the proximity and influence of Hindu majority in India), men and women's equality is enshrined in the teachings of *Guru Granth Sahib*.
- Child marriage is forbidden.

Contrary to what might be thought, arranged marriage is not an exclusive Indian creation. In fact, In Egyptian and Greek times marriages were already arranged by parents. Thus, women were chosen on the basis of being “the best partner for the household and children” (Foucault 1987: 156). In spite of the relevance and cruelty of the issue we can only find a reference to this marriage type in a slogan in the primary bibliography. The British-Asian girls' awareness of the existence of forced marriages lead them on a march outside Downing Street so as to avoid the situation of women abused by their husbands and to let them speak their mind so that the cruelties suffered in silence for years become known to everyone regardless of race or condition. Thus, the slogan

TONY BLAIR
ABOLISH FORCED MARRIAGES.
WOULD YOUR PARENTS HAVE
CHOSEN CHERIE FOR YOU?

(*B and B* 2005: 85)

is aimed at the British Prime Minister's psyche in order to provoke a more immediate and stronger impact on the different communities in Britain.

Having said this, this dissertation cannot be continued without any reference to three key differences between marriage in our society and in India. Firstly, while the West defends the role of the couple, the family stands, as has been considered above, as the most important institution in India. Secondly, while in the West love precedes marriage, in India marriage will make love grow. Finally, Indian marriage is not based on passion as it is perceived as a transitory factor in the relationship. Both in India and the West the search for prospective candidates has been extended to the newspapers and the internet, mainly in big cities like Delhi, Bombay, Madras and Calcutta. The

consequences of the strictness of the Indian way lead the British-Asian characters to experience extreme situations that put to the test the human condition, like infidelity in Samir's case. As a rite of passage he has to go through as a Sikh, and in order to satisfy his family, he becomes another victim of an arranged marriage and becomes subject to a wife he is totally unaware of and despite the existence of a lover, an English woman, Cloey. The apparent accomplishment of his expected conduct runs parallel with the maintenance of his lover. Nevertheless, it is the discovery of Cloey's real attitude that brings a new awakening in his marital life and the realisation that he cannot blame his wife for the situation,

Most Indian marriages start at the same place, two strangers thrown together, sent off on a wing and a prayer to work it out for themselves. Some couples become real couples quicker than others, love gets grip and takes hold of them at the outset. Some take years, decades even, to reach that same happy state. And others never find love at all, and live to old age and die with romantic feelings that were never allowed to exist.

(*S and S* 2003: 402)

But a whole system hard to find against. Added to this, there is the fact that his definition of a love marriage does not conform either his wife or what he refers to as his half-love for Cloey, not strong enough to confront the situation and overcome his psychological battle. Contrary to Cloey's aim in life, to lie to men in order to gain socio-economic stability, the writer offers Samir's wife's forgiveness, fully aware that the main problem in the couple is the lack of trust, originated from the lack of knowledge of the other, so similarly to Samir; she cannot blame her husband either but the chains of tradition. However, such forgiveness does not respond to natural impulses of the individual but to her awareness that her divorce would worsen her situation as a woman and would imply a relationship with a divorced man. In the end, Samir "thanked his parents for finding him Kareena" (*S and S* 2003: 402). When Kareena tells her mother about the solution to her marital problems "her mother had cried joyfully down the phone in Punjabi, her Indian pride now restored" (*S and S* 2003: 405). While

Samir is capable of regret as he is able to see through the harm caused and beyond all lies, Armin's (*B and B* 2005) regret moves in the line of respect for the others.

All this portrays the sadness of most marriages, a state that cannot be easily modified but that is part of proper conduct. The next section includes some of the most relevant differences between the West and the East and changes in contemporary society as concerns marriage.

2.1.4.3 Contemporary trends

First of all it is important to emphasize a key difference between the Indian and Western culture. Traditionally young Hindus and Sikhs from India had their marital partner chosen by their parents but the distinction between parents' decision and their decision is less evident nowadays. Increasingly, Indian parents are less closely involved and the trend is for Asian teenagers in a Western culture to choose their own partners. Thus, arranged marriage is becoming less common among the young, and even in cases of an initial arranged marriage this is finally avoided as we will show in the literature under study. This will be the case in *The Marriage Market* (2006). In this novel, Jeena's parents disappointment at their daughter's relationship with a white man forces their decision to send her to India for an arranged marriage while in her parents' view respond to a punishment for having betrayed them and not having followed the Indian way. In Jeena's case, the negative associations of marriage in India with women being sent to marry men who only wanted a slave, a passport into Britain, or money from a good dowry lead to her decision on a friendship marriage so as not to be taken to India and be caught in an arranged marriage. It is in this novel that the writer introduces an aspect regarding the prospective candidate for marriage not included in the previous novels. Despite being aware of the fact that arranged marriages were the Indian way, it did not fulfil her expectations in the British context,

She'[Jeena]d presumed the Indian man would be like her, a British-born Asian, someone who spoke English, someone with things in common with her.

(TMM 2006: 34)

It points to a new discourse on marriage more in tune with the social and cultural environment. After this new marriage, divorce would come, and with this, the impossibility on her parents' side to marry her off to another man given her condition as a divorcee after a marriage with a white man. In the Indian community's view she will be "no better than a garden slug" (TMM 2006: 53).

Over the last years, two trends have become characteristic of British society. Firstly, inter-racial marriages are happening with increasing regularity. A direct consequence of interpersonal relations in a multicultural context is the tendency for inter-racial relationships, and with this, inter-racial marriages. Together with Jeena's marriage with a white man, the rest of the female protagonists point to this tendency in the relationship with a white man, which contributes to a desired freedom regarding the Indian way, and to the acceptance of the new situation for Indian parents. As Jeena's mother states on the decision to buy a wedding sari for her daughter after the latter decides on a Sikh wedding after having gone through a British one,

We are going to splash out on this wedding. We don't want anyone thinking we're ashamed because you're marrying a white man.

(TMM 2006: 312)

This new discourse on personal and cultural relations does not free the individual from the most radical sectors of their community.

THIS BRICK IS NOT FROM YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD
NOR IS YOUR WIFE.
MIX WHITE WITH BROWN AND WHAT DO YOU GET?
RED.

(TMM 2006: 366)

The only hope of the couple was that the community's acceptance would come after the family had accepted it and it put an end to the Indian community's tendency to take the law into their own hands and each threat was followed by another one.

These marriages tend to happen more between Hindus and white British and are a proof of the possible coexistence between different cultures as well as the fact that such relationships overcome any difference of colour or race. Secondly, another emerging trend appears to be for Hindus born and brought up in Britain to marry a partner from India. As Lau (2000) perceives, one possible hypothesis is to do with the increasing rates of divorce in Asian marriages when both partners are brought up in the Western society. At the same time, there appears to be very few partnerships between different Asian groups, that is, between Indians, Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, Sri Lankan, Sikhs, Chinese and so forth. There appear to be almost no partnerships between Pakistanis and Bangladeshis. In the case of the first generation it is possible that after an unsuccessful inter-racial marriage one member of the couple decides not to marry another Asian man or woman again. A possible explanation may be the need for a greater degree of tolerance. However, this hypothesis needs to be watched carefully. The primary bibliography does not observe any of these combinations. Furthermore, regardless of the social and cultural implications of multiculturalism and the process of negotiation of tradition defended in this dissertation, the relationship between an Indian girl and a white man is still shocking for any Indian family. Thus, despite the long path walked by Indian people,

Why is it that whenever an Indian woman is seen with a white man any Indian family in the vicinity will drop what they are doing to stare? Two arms, two legs, one head, what's the problem? Oh yeah, too white.

(B and B 2005: 239)

The relationship with a white man was interpreted by the Indian community as the opposition to tradition and, consequently, as betrayal.

In the 1950's men and women married early and remained married for the rest of their lives. By the 1990s both men and women tended to marry much later in age. As to mixed ethnicity marriages, these form a very small proportion, of all marriages or partnerships in the population in Great Britain-only about 1% (Lau 2000: 28). If young people from the ethnic minorities enter into mixed ethnic marriage or partnership it is often considered by members of the community as a betrayal of the community identity. The [Indian] women novelists have not taken up the social problems like the evil influence of the caste system and intercaste marriages (Bai 1996: 21). We can observe how most of the traditions and conventions fade away because of the influence of Western culture.

2.1.4.4 *Sexuality and marriage*

In Chapter 1, I highlighted the relationship between gender and sexuality, which has always been at the heart of scholarly discussion. Notwithstanding, its perception depends on the time lived. Needless to say that what was deemed correct and acceptable at certain times cannot be so and is even rejected later. Back in ancient Greek times, among the husband's obligations towards his wife, being faithful to her was not included and exclusive sexual relationships with his wife were not obligatory; the concept of mutual faithfulness did not exist as we understand it today. The wife belonged to her husband but he belonged to himself (Foucault 1998: 147). However, and in common with Hindu culture, girls were given to their husbands early in age. As Xenophon claims:

when sheep fare badly, we usually fault the shepherd and when a horse behaves badly, we usually speak badly of the horseman; as for the woman, if she has been taught the good things by the man and still acts badly, the woman could perhaps justly be held at fault, on the other hand, if he doesn't teach the fine and good things but makes use of her as though she is quite ignorant of them, wouldn't the man justly be held at fault?-. Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, III, 11 (Foucault 1998: 155)

First of all it is worth saying that faithfulness is conceived in a different way regarding men and women, and in certain cases, husband and wife. Therefore for her husband, it affects his wife exclusively but for the wife she is unfaithful to the husband, children and family. The transgression of fidelity overshadows not only her honour and status but also those of her family. In the *Guru Granth Sahib*,

1. Shame to him Who commits adultery. *Guru V, Jaijivanti Rag*
2. A man full of lust, Gazes at another's wife. *Kabirji, Sri Rag*
- [...]
4. He is blind who deserts his own wife, and commits adultery with another's in the meanness of conscience. *Namdevji, Bhairo Rag*
5. He possesses a beautiful wife of good family. Yet commits adultery with another woman, He cannot distinguish between evil and good. *Guru V, Gauri Rag*
6. He who does not go near another man's wife and wealth, God is near and ever near to him. *Namdevji, Bhairo Rag*
7. He commits adultery with another's wife, and talks ill of saints, He does not listen for a while the praises of Lord, He usurps another's money for the sake of his self, the fire of desire is not extinguished. *Guru V, Gauri Rag*

Contrary to the silence expected from women regarding unfaithfulness, now in the works under analysis, the other possibility is not to ignore it but to fight against it. It can be interpreted as a strategy to overcome the inner thought of betrayal in her as will be observed in section IV (see 4.2.6) concerning *Saris and Sins* (2003) and *Bindis and Brides* (2005) where the female characters take an active role. As regards the former, Kareena, confronting her husband for his unfaithfulness and speaking bluntly and concerning the latter, Zarleena, her strength to divorce him after physical and psychological abuse and opening a shop with both as a key to personal and economic independence.

Faithfulness can be considered as the accomplishment of one's own desire or as the creation of rumours and as the strategy to regain some love lost as shown in *Passion and Poppadoms* (2004). In Thomas' case he is defined as "a rare species of man" (*P*

and P 2004: 37), as he would never have an affair no matter the number of pretty and perfect girls before him. His girlfriend begins to inspect his clothes. As she says,

Even a Bad Girl needs to know if 00 Bastard is being faithful.

(P and P 2004: 242)

In the next page we, the readers, are reminded that,

Suddenly she was reminded of what she loved about Thomas. His fidelity. His total commitment to one woman (···) It would be a sad slur on their relationship if it took only a few remarks from a commis chef and a couple of suspicious actions from Thomas to declare him an adulterer. It wouldn't hold up in court. The judge would ask for more advice.

So more evidence would be gathered.

(P and P 2004: 243)

At the turn of the century society has experienced an evolutionary process that is gradually moving from repression into a relative tolerance to extramarital relations.

2.1.4.5 Divorce

Contrary to the social acceptance of marriage, it is deemed crucial to consider some points gathered in the *Hindu Marriage Act* [number 25 of 1955] as far as they concern us in the study. We have to remember that divorce is not accepted in all circumstances in the Indian tradition, both Hindu and Sikh:

- (1) Any marriage solemnized (...) may, on a petition presented by either the husband or the wife, be dissolved by a decree of divorce on the ground that the other party-
 - [(i) has, after the solemnation of the marriage, had voluntary sexual intercourse with any person other than his or her spouse; or
 - [(ia) has, after the solemnation of the marriage, treated the petitioner with cruelty; or

(ib) has deserted the petitioner for a continuous period of not less than two years immediately preceding the presentation of the petition; or]

(ii) has ceased to be a Hindu by conversion to another religion; or

[iii)has been incurably of unsound mind, or has been suffering continuously or intermittently from mental disorder of such a kind and to such an extent that the petitioner cannot reasonably be expected to live with the respondent.

(2) A wife may also present a petition for the dissolution of her marriage by a decree of divorce on the ground, _ (...)

(ii) that the husband has, since the solemnation of the marriage, been guilty of rape, sodomy or [bestiality; or]. (...)

(iv) that her marriage (whether consummated or not) was solemnized before she attained the age of fifteen years and she has repudiated the marriage after attaining that age but before attaining the age of eighteen years. (Hindu Marriage Act 1955: 86)

As will be seen in Chapter 4, section 4.2.6, divorce is not initially accepted,

If you look for the word divorce in the Indian dictionary, you won't find it. Instead are the words, 'go and bloody well look up another word. Suggested word to look up:shame'. And it is shameful. One life, one partner, one death, no divorce -it's as simple as that.

(S and S 2003: 381)

Thus, contrary to *Bindis and Brides* (2005) and Zarleena's decision to divorce, it takes longer for Kareena to make such a decision. While divorce is not accepted in Indian culture, the individuals who cannot go against it in order not to hurt his parents search for other solutions, one being infidelity, contrary to Kareena's mother advice,

If he shouts at you, ignore it. If he doesn't help round the house, ignore it. If he leaves a black rim round the bath, ignore it. Just ignore everything.

(S and S 2003: 382)

She defends a life of her own through a break with her past, and consequently, with a break with a code of conduct directed at women in order to be socially approved and keep her husband happy kept through history. With this, she is breaking a long list of rules about expected behaviour during marriage in favour of a life of fulfilment and personal satisfaction, as will be the case regarding the female characters created in the rest of the primary bibliography. Together with this, advice, as highlighted above, and as a word that will be repeated along this dissertation, implies a form of power. As Tannen (1990: 53) highlights “giving advice is asymmetrical. It frames the advice giver as more knowledgeable, more reasonable, more in control,-in a word, one-up. And this contributes to the distancing effect”. Therefore the advice on the parents’ side implicates a greater defence of traditional values. Nevertheless, and as is represented in this book the circumstances force parents to accept it for their daughter’s happiness sake.

2.1.5 Birth

First of all it is worth saying that, as considered by Sales (2004: 126), in India “marriage and motherhood are important regarding both the biological female act and the symbolic attachment to the country.” Thus it cannot be denied that with the arrival of womanhood, a woman’s life changes and identity goes through a process of transformation and construction which is never completely fulfilled. As we can exemplify briefly with Sunita’s words:

For a woman, your whole sense of identity is transformed when you become a mother. The I becomes We forever, and of course that has profound implications for your primary relationships.

(LHH 1999: 295)

In Asian families parenting does not come as a nasty shock to the young woman. Rather, within a well-functioning family, pregnancy is an expected and welcome event, for which her mother and female kinfolk will have prepared her. In contrast, in the industrialised West, parenting, or the discovery of pregnancy, even within the context of

a stable relationship, may be experienced negatively; as a career interruption, or a threat to a comfortable lifestyle, rather than a *raison d'être*. Producing a child, especially a male child, still signifies security for many a young wife in an arranged marriage, and an entry into full social status of the parental couple.

2.1.6 Religion

As regards religion, two key points need be highlighted. On the one hand, the religious tradition is one of the strongest features of South Indian society in a way that religion is rated at the top in the lives of the people, contrary to contemporary society. On the other, the religious tradition has its vitality and power because of the significant role of women and their contribution. They consider religion as real. Thus, one of the first factors that mark the difference between the Indian and the British population is religion. As we will see the more contact between the younger generations from both cultural backgrounds the less important it becomes to the second generation of British Asians. According to a study, *Focus on Religion*³, by the National Statistics Service published 11th October 2004, fifteen per cent of people in Great Britain (8.6 million people) said they had no religion, according to the 2001 Census. Seventy-two per cent of people (41 million) identified themselves as Christian, making it the largest religious group. Muslims were the second largest religious group (1.6 million) and the information provided by them shows a young, tightly clustered, and often disadvantaged, community. The survey results also consider marriage patterns and conclude that 16 per cent of young people with no religion cohabit. People with no religion were the most likely to be cohabiting (16 per cent of 16 to 24 year olds in 2001). Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims were the least likely to do so.

³ *Focus on Religion* is the latest in a series of on-line reports available on the National Statistics website. For more information visit <<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/focuson/religion>>.

2.1.6.1 Hinduism

First of all it is worth saying that the canon law of Hinduism is defined by what people do rather than by what they think. Thus it is characterised by a greater uniformity of action rather than of beliefs although very few beliefs and practices are shared by everyone. It is more a culture than a creed (Sharma 2004: 252). Any Hindu must conform to three ordinances, the family, caste and religion, three of the conflictive areas in gender relationships as a result of both the generational gap and duality. A key issue is *dharma*, right conduct, discussed in the *Laws of Manu*. It is divided into two parts, the individual and the social. A man's life is divided in four stages. The first stage alludes, among others, to the obligations of family life, including his responsibilities as a member of the social body. The third stage refers to the cultivation of the spirit of renunciation and the fourth stage to his intellectual side. The strategic role played by religion, also applied to Sikhism as indicated below and later on Chapter 4 is exemplified in *Passion and Poppadoms* (2004) where according to Hindu tradition, and following her grandmother's advice, Marina decides to throw Ganges water over the loved man's head to gain his love.

2.1.6.2 Sikhism

The aim of life is to lead an exemplary existence so that one may merge with God. Sikhs should remember God at all times and practice living a virtuous and truthful life while maintaining a balance between their spiritual obligations and temporal obligations. As we will see in our books the spiritual weight of religions falls down and turns into the means for the attainment of particular goals like false appearances or one's own partner according to our choices. All this will be exemplified mainly in *Saris and Sins* (2003). In this novel, Samir goes through an arranged marriage with Kareena in order to comply with his social role. In spite of this marriage he keeps a lover, an English woman, Cloey. On the discovery of her husband's whereabouts, and as will be analysed into greater detail in Chapter 4, and contrary to her expectations and code of conduct as an Indian woman, she is able to take action and confront her husband

through the adoption of an assertive attitude. Being aware of his lies and the implications of the Indian way over the individual, he tries to convince her of his innocence and denies the existence of Cloey. Lacking in conviction and logical reasons he resorts to his situation as a true Sikh. Thus, and as dictated by his religion he is supposed not to lie, but he does though. Consequently, he uses his condition as a Sikh man strategically in order to calm his wife down and not to worsen the situation.

In a later novel by Nisha Minhas, one strategy used by Jeena's mother so that her daughter followed the right Indian path is through reference to the Gurus. As her mother told her, the Gurus could listen into people's minds. As she stated,

Avoid impure thoughts at all times as your punishment will be severe.

(TMM 2006: 43)

These words are connected with the idea of the code of conduct and the advice passed on to Indian daughters. It is clearly unappealing for an Indian woman to act other than the way dictated by tradition, even worse, and carrying more severe punishment when the behaviour of the individual contains sexual motives or implications.

Jeena's father's vision of Aaron, a representative of the white man changes from the moment he tries to make him aware of the importance of happiness over tradition through a direct reference to his childhood without parents. While Aaron had no choice in being an orphan, Jeena's father had a choice. It is then when he remembers one of Guru Nanak's teachings that

Guru Nanak [the first of ten Sikh Gurus, or teachers] believed that a man should stand up for his principles and that everyone was equal no matter what the colour of their skin, their creed or their faith. A view that Papaji was sure that his older brother, Gurjinder, in India, would argue against with bite.

(TMM 2006: 280)

Which made him feel proud as concerns his responsibility for the Sikh community. It is then when she becomes aware of a side of the white man unknown to the Indian elders, “The side of humility and love” (TMM 2006: 281). Some of the principles of correct conduct are collected in *The Marriage Market*:

- No sex before marriage. The sexual behaviour of young Sikh women is strictly monitored.
- Sikhs do not eat beef. (TMM 2006 : 29)
- Nightclubs, pubs and bars were pure fantasy for most Indian girls (TMM 2006 : 31) allowed to Jeena on the condition that she did not talk to men. Conversing with men, even in a natural and innocent way, is disapproved of by the Sikh community and is seen as flirting (Rait 2005: 85).
- Avoid impure thoughts at all times as your punishment will be severe (TMM 2006: 43)
- Discipline and family morals.
- Study the Bible.
- No mixed marriages.

2.1.7 Racism and prejudice

Immigrants, refugees and minorities can be related to the processes of individual personality. This form of enmity can be defined as prejudice. But the majority of opposition is socially and culturally generated, rather than organically related to the individual psyche. This latter form of hostility can be described as empathy (Holmes 1991: 6). Even characters of a later generation, born and bred in Britain, are subjected to indignities. However, while the South Asians’ world is defined and pervaded by the whites, the Anglo world is insulated from the reality of the South-Asian Britons’ lives (Crane 2000: 94).

Racial discrimination in Britain and by the British can only fully be understood within the wider historical context of British imperial and global power (Walvin 1984:

219). Nevertheless, British life, long before the coming of modern immigration, has been much more varied than is normally recognized. The differences between regions, religions, classes, between urban and rural life have all ensured that Britain has been a veritable mosaic of contrasting cultures throughout the period of industrial society. Such diversity within Britain is, of course, the very fact which prevents many critics from writing about 'British society' as a whole (Walvin 1984: 220).

In our corpus, different facets of racism can be identified. It is represented in the form of racist vocabulary and prejudice. As a mode of example a member of a minority culture is asked about racism in a job interview and this question is shaped by the awareness of the desired answer by the interviewer. As Tania, a British-Asian girl, states concerning her comments in any job interview in her attempt to become a mainstream writer, and which is analysed more closely in section 4.2.10.1,

I make up stories about skinheads and shit through letterboxes, because that's the kind of racism they want to hear about. It lets my nice interviewer off the hook, it confirms that the real baddies live far away from a safe distance. I never tell them about the stares and whimpers and the anonymous gobs of phlegm at the bus stops.

(LHH 1999: 144)

She is a character "falling into the trap of 'artificial Indianness' (McClellan 2006: 72), assimilation, something that Meera Syal does not advocate.

The issue that concerns us here stems from both the Indian and the white community, as I will analyse in Chapter 4. In the first case, the Indians think themselves in possession of the right to judge other members of their community basing their words in gender terms. In the second case, racism is disguised in the form of ignorance, hypocrisy and lack of understanding reflected in language and in the placing of notices in shops warning minority groups of the restricted entrance to the shop. This attitude is caused by nothing more than the difficulty of understanding the white community's faults.

2.1.8 Sex and desire in Indian culture

One of the factors that shape identity is sexual relationships. Thus to start with I will consider the issues of sexuality, desire and fantasies. In order to better understand the role played by sex in human relations, and more specifically in British Asian teenagers, it is necessary to look at some hints in the complex field of Hindu deities and sexuality. Not only are the latter mentioned by the characters but they also constitute the genuine foundation of a full code of beliefs and behaviour that set the basis for a whole and everlasting conception of life.

For the Hindus, the woman is seen as a Sita, the Hindu ideal of the selfless and the devoted wife, and Kali, the horrible goddess of blood, a witch-like goddess who punishes and deprives her children of pleasure. Women whose sexual demands are refused are believed to become witches and must be appeased, lest they turn against men in reprisal. In our analysis, sex is considered as a powerful strategy in a particular situation, time and place as well as the carrier of a whole ideological body. The conduct of sexual relations goes beyond the inner domain of the household and it is beginning not to be regarded as such a taboo among the younger generations any longer but as a daily issue as we will see. In Sikhism, and similarly to Hinduism, women are supposed to remain virgins until marriage and not to show any sign of affection in public.

2.1.8.1 *Desire, sexuality and dreams*

2.1.8.1.1 Sexuality

Sexuality is an important aspect in life and it is intimately tied to relations and personal adjustment. Despite the fact that sex is a source of pleasure, fulfilment and a very powerful and potent form of communication, in the Indian household talking about sex is a taboo. India developed an *ars erotica* opposed to our *scientia sexualis*. In the *ars erotica*, pleasure is understood as a practice and accumulated as experience; pleasure is not considered in relation to an absolute law of the permitted and the

forbidden, nor by reference to a criterion of utility, but first and foremost in relation to itself (Foucault 1998: 58).

As to sexuality, it has always been considered from the point of view of heterosexuality and homosexuality. The reader may find this distinction as obvious but their ideological burden is even greater when, as a mode of example, such homosexuality cannot be considered as natural but as forced by the circumstances of oppression lived by some female characters.

As far as heterosexuality is concerned, at the ideological level, in the majority of male-dominated cultures it has been established as a norm rather than as an option that forbids the individual choosing his sexual preferences and, worse, denying the individual himself. Butler (1990: 16) uses the term heterosexual matrix to refer to the

grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders and desires are neutralised (...) to characterise a hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality (ibid 151)

Despite this, later on (1993) she defended that the term heterosexual hegemony can be modified.

As has been applied to the notion of gender, sex (and within it we include sexual options and desire) conforms to rigid social rules between the permitted and the forbidden, the accepted and unaccepted. Thus, heterosexuality, “the metaphor through which the peer social order organises itself” (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2002: 26) would be the accepted choice. Besides it cannot be forgotten that gender identity is undoubtedly reinforced by the reaffirmation of heterosexuality, or as stated in Sigurd D’hondt (2002: 208), “gender is available through an articulation of heterosexual desire.” When this reaffirmation is challenged or denied gender relations enter the arena of an everlasting conflict. As to homosexuality, contrary to the contemporary period, for

Greek thought the love to be felt for either members of the same sex or for members of the other sex was not exclusive, the acceptance of one of them did not imply the rejection of the other. In the same way they did not distinguish different types of desire. As Foucault 1998: 190) points out “they [referring to the Greeks] saw two ways of enjoying pleasure”.

During the 1920’s and 1940’s homosexuality moved from being considered pathology to being regarded as a social identity in the 1950’s and 1960’s and as a minority identity (homogeneous group) in the 1970’s and 1990’s. It later became the source of interest as regards language research until the present day.

In the contemporary Western society women are brought up according to the norms of what Eckert calls the heterosexual market. Thus they develop feminine traits that will ease their integration into the apparently simple context of heterosexual relations and will subordinate them to their female peers. We will see the way these norms are infringed. For Vivien Nice, and contrary to what has been considered so far, (1992: 126) homosexuality is considered as an inborn trait and she emphasizes the fear of the mother concerning the way her daughter must be regarded by the people around her. It can also be seen as the escape from patriarchal control. As either an inborn trait or as an imposition it goes against the Indian code, as a consequence, it is repulsed.

As to Hinduism, it is not specifically concerned but there is some mention of it in the puranas, holy texts written to impress on the minds of the masses the teachings of the Vedas and to generate in them devotion to God, through concrete examples, myths, stories, legends, lives of saints, kings and great men, allegories and chronicles of great historical events, which suggests that it is wrong. Sikhism does not mention it, it is considered illegal and saying it is correct to be homosexual may have caused uproar.

2.1.8.1.2 Desire

Throughout history desire has been considered as a dangerous and transgressive force, an external force that the individual could not fight against; an invader, in Alice Deignan's words (1997: 21), "which moves into the body of the experiencer, or a force external to its experiencer, one which he or she is almost powerless to resist." For psychologists, it is an irrational phenomenon, "structured by the unconscious processes of prohibition, regression and fantasy" (Cameron and Kulick 2003: 107).

In our culture desire has become a player at the *macro*-level of social and political forces (Harvey and Shalom 1997: 2). From an early age we are taught a specific form of desire- a desire defined in terms of a member of the other sex. One thing is the form of desire we are culturally and socially offered and another the specific Hindu or Sikh cultural restriction according to which you are not supposed to feel any desire for any man other than the selected one. This form of desire is not considered to be individual but shared by your community as has been indicated above and constitutes one of the main rules of behaviour transmitted via conduct books through time and generations. We could even go a step further and regard our self as partly shaped by desire.

The concept of desire is closely linked to ideology. However, on some occasions we behave and act without being conscious of the institutional, cultural and social consequences and/or reasons hidden behind. As we will see in our books, this consciousness is present in the female characters' mind in the form of fear, the fear of shame and punishment. The challenge would be, as Eckert (2002: 100) suggests, adopting an approach that focuses on the social mediation of desire; to construct a view of desire that is simultaneously internal and individual, and external and shared. However, desire is not only linked to desire but also to the lack of desire, "undesired" as used by Eckert (2002: 103).

Together with desire dreams acquire a special significance. My concern here is not with sexual dreams but with the significant role played by dreams and desire in

relation to sexual and gender identity. In the second century, Artemidorus, known for an extensive five-volume Greek work *Oneirocritica*, translated as *The Interpretation of Dreams* in English, considered that the sexual dream is favourable if a woman dreams of being with a man it is good as it is in accordance with her natural and social roles. If a man dreams of another man it is only considered favourable if his partner is of higher status and age than him. His interpretation could be re-formulated within the constraints of British-Asian teenagers of an Indian upbringing. Therefore if a British-Asian woman was known to dream of a white man it would be considered unfavourable and bring shame to the family. As I will analyse in section 4.2.8.2, in spite of the female characters awareness of their cultural and social repression they cannot but let their feelings and impulses show themselves (Naina in *Chapatti or Chips*, Marina in *Passion and Poppadoms, Bindis and Brides*). It can be summarised, as a mode of example, with the first meeting between Aaron, a white sport instructor, and Jeena, the female protagonist, in charge of a weekly column devoted to Asian topics in the *Asian Delight* newspaper in *The Marriage Market* (2006). During her interview on sport she meets Aaron. The mutual attraction and desire on first sight and the fact of him giving her his phone number takes the form of a dilemma between instinct, that is, moving away from him as it corresponds to improper conduct in her culture and, inquisitiveness, that is, keeping the number. Thus, what would be regarded as a natural reaction of acceptance is translated in the dichotomy between expected and desired behaviour in British-Asian female girls. Therefore in the Indian case desire is not only determined by a member of the opposite sex as maintained above but also in terms of race and ethnicity and, within the latter, the man chosen to become the husband-to-be. In the most radical of the cases, it may be regarded as a preservation of the purity of the race and morals as part of the maintenance of the dominant ideology and power hierarchy. As the writer observes,

It was an old dilemma for a British-born Asian rearing its ugly head again: what happens when a white man, whom you feel some attraction to, begins a process which could, in some cases, lead to the bedroom? Do you fight it, ignore it or go with the flow?

(TMM 2006: 46)

Out of the three options pointed out concerning sexual relations with a white man the one that predominates in the primary bibliography is the last one, go with the flow. Nevertheless this option is not free from an inner psychological battle between the right thing to do and the response to one's needs to the triumph of the latter. The dialogue with her own conscience does not deprive her of the joy of the previous time to the chains of a fate thought for her rather than by her,

What law exists that excludes Indian women from having fun before they settle down to a life of dreary, domestic, hardship? Who can really blame young Asian girls from straying a little when they know the future is bleak and bare of fun? Surely the glue of the Indian way isn't strong enough to keep all the feet stuck to the righteous path. Life is so short at the best of times so why not fill that life with excitement and life.

(TMM 2006: 48)

2.1.8.2 *Three figures in understanding sex from the Hindu perspective*

2.1.8.2.1 Sita

Sita is a goddess of spring, agriculture and the earth. She is the Corn Mother, the field which brings forth bounteously. She emerged as a significant divinity with Valmiki's Ramayana, written sometime between 200 BC and 200 AD, and various vernacular renditions of the same, with slightly modified contents, over next several centuries. These texts extol Rama and Sita as the divine couple, and countless myths, legends, and folklores revolve around them. Sita is always represented in association with Rama, her husband, and Rama is central to her life and existence. She has the dominant role of all Hindu mythological tradition as the portrayal of the ideal woman and ideal wife. She represents wifely devotion, forbearance and chastity. She overshadows several other divine Hindu wives including Parvati and Lakshmi, and other similar devoted wives of Hindu mythology like Savitri and Damayanti.

2.1.8.1.2 Kali

Kali is the goddess of dissolution and destruction. She is known for destroying ignorance, and she helps those who strive for knowledge of God. Kali, black earth mother, [destructive energy]; sprang from Durga's forehead during a fit of rage. Her rites include sacrificial killing [at one time human], dressed with earrings of little children, necklace of snakes, skulls and heads of her sons, belt of severed arms, thirst for blood.

2.1.8.1.3 The *Laws of Manu* (200BC-AD 200)

The *Laws of Manu* [see appendix for Structure or *Manava Dharma Shastra*] is one of the standard books in the Hindu canon, and a basic text for all gurus to base their teachings on. This revealed scripture comprises 2684 verses, divided into twelve chapters presenting the norms of domestic, social, and religious life in India (circa 500 BC) under the Brahmin influence, and is fundamental to the understanding of ancient Indian society.

Though it was probably written in the first or second century BC, the traditions that it presents are much older, perhaps dating back to the period of Aryan invasions almost fifteen hundred years earlier. Manu himself was a mythical character, the first man, who was transformed into a king by the great god Brahma because of his ability to protect the people. The fact that the ancient Indians attributed the beginnings of kingship and social classes to the first man is evidence that they themselves recognized the antiquity of these institutions.

In these laws, some points concerning Hindu sexuality can be traced although I will only consider the points related to our analysis and I will regard them as part of the norms of behaviour to accomplish and as a consequence can be read as a conduct book. They have been taken from Chapter 3 and they will be applied to the analysis of our novels:

45. Let (the husband) approach his wife in due season, being constantly satisfied with her (alone); he may also, being intent on pleasing her, approach her with a desire for conjugal union (on any day) excepting the Parvans.

48. On the even nights sons are conceived and daughters on the uneven ones; hence a man who desires to have sons should approach his wife in due season on the even (nights).

49. A male child is produced by a greater quantity of male seed, a female child by the prevalence of the female; if (both are) equal, a hermaphrodite or a boy and a girl; if (both are) weak or deficient in quantity, a failure of conception (results).

(*Laws of Manu* Chapter 3)

Having reached this point the focus of attention is the conception of sexual relations for Indian women.

2.1.8.3 *Sexual relations for Indian women*

As in the 16th and 17th centuries, the chaste and prudent Indian wife became admirable. Indian women are supposed not to have had sexual relationships before marriage. It is on the wedding night that they lose their virginity and have to offer their body to a stranger. Thus is not worth risking this morality in the hands of a casual relationship with a white man. As it is said by the narrator in *Chapatti or Chips*,

Indian women were under no circumstances allowed to be cheap. Their virginity was a luxury item that no one could afford until wedlock.

(*Ch or Ch* 2000: 239)

Leena and Naina' s thought of a cheap thrill with a cheap man made them cheap. Nevertheless, this conception of being cheap clearly opposes Zarleena' s in *Bindis and Brides* (2005) feeling on the wedding night, when not only is her virginity put into question by her husband but she also becomes the target of sex for sex sake without any regards for the feelings of the partner. As Zarleena maintains,

The first time Zarleena's husband, Armin, made love to her, he made her feel cheap. No words, no kind gestures, no passion. Just a grunting man lying on top of her, sweating and pounding, until he was satisfied; Zarleena not daring to cry out that he was hurting her, afraid he would blame her for wrecking the moment.

(*B and B* 2005: 11)

This quotation represents the submission of the woman given the obligation to go through an arranged marriage despite Armin's, Zarleena's husband, real feelings for another woman.

In *Passion and Poppadoms* (2004: 245) British-Asian women are referred to as subdued lovers. Aristotle saw the relationship between a man and a woman as political; the relation of the ruler over the ruled when he refers to feminine virtues. "The one who rules-i.e., the man- "possesses moral goodness in its full and perfect form", whereas the ruled, including women, need only have "moral goodness to the extent required of them" (Aristotle, *Politics*, I, 1260a). Sexual relationships and behaviour were closely related to the state and politics. If in sex a subordinate role was played, they could not play an active role in "civil and political activity" (Foucault 1998: 220).

One of the tasks of power in relation to sex is prohibition, renunciation. For the most part, taboo has always been at the heart of scholarly interest in sex. As Michel Foucault noticed in his *History of Sexuality I* (1998: 84) "power constrains sex only through a taboo that plays on the alternative between two nonexistences." As a mode of example, Naina "had tried `men', or rather `boys', behind her parents' back" (days of school and college) (*Ch or Ch* 2000: 30). It is in Nisha Minha's first novel that the female protagonist experiences the move from the innocence of a kiss to the discovery of lustful thoughts. Together with her awareness that she could not go against the Indian way, there was the inner battle between the consciousness that in her culture her body was unreachable until after marriage, and her attraction towards Dave, a white man she should not mix with as cultures should not mix, an idea that will be re-examined by the writer in a later book, *Passion and Poppadoms* (2004). The dialogue with her

conscience will come to words as shown in the following passage, words that would be culturally censored as part as the predominant discourse on the Indian female' s sexual conduct regarding virginity and the prohibition of sexual desire with a man from a different culture, and with this, identity,

He [Dave] was the only man who gave her sexual feelings, who would turn her on, who made her dream of what it would be like to have him inside her.

(Ch or Ch 2000: 31)

For Rycroft (1972: 174) taboo refers to “the setting apart of an object or a person or for the absolute prohibition of some class of acts on the grounds that it would be a violation of the culture’s whole system of thought”. Not only is it regarded in terms of prohibition but also as a guarantee for the continuance of the system. As we will see later sex taboos begin a gradual process of erosion within the younger generations as a consequence of the social and intellectual trends. These taboos are also broken in an intimate context.

2.2 Identity

2.2.1 New identities

One of the most hotly debated issues in the academic field has focused on identity to judge by its literature. If so much is being said and researched in the 21st century it is to be regarded as a justification of the ever changing and moving role of the question at hand; it constitutes an alive issue that responds to the existing social demands and conditions. First of all it is worth saying that identity is not only personal but also a product of a particular time and location and it is to be regarded as an active process. In most cases it is not a matter of personal choice but of social and/or cultural imposition, a question of opposition *My* identity against *Yours* between the members of different communities. As Yuval Davis (Charles and Hintjens 1998: 169) highlighted

“identity constitutes the conscious “self”, a desire to be oneself in a context of opposition”. Yuval-Davis (1998: 169) distinguishes two sets of traits that characterize identity. Some traits can be “transitory or situational (e.g. being of a certain age, occupation, having certain relationships) while others are perceived to be permanent and natural (sex and familiar/ethnic, national origin)”.

Hall (1992b: 275) provides three definitions of identity although only the second one is worth considering from the point of view of our research purposes. Thus, he distinguishes three different conceptions:

- Enlightenment subject, based on a conception of the human person as a fully centred, unified individual, endowed with the capacities of reason, consciousness and action (...). The essential centre of the self was a person’s identity.
- Sociological subject. The inner core of the subject was not autonomous and self-sufficient, but was formed in relation to significant others, who mediated to the subject the values, meanings and symbols-the culture of the worlds he/she inhabited.
- Post-modern subject, having no fixed, essential or permanent identity.

Although Hall (1992b: 276) observes with much truth that the subject is in a continuous dialogue with the cultural worlds outside and the identities which they offer this cannot be considered in a context of culture clash as regards the younger generations. In fact Indian restrictional society does not allow such dialogue with the world that surrounds the individual as it involves threat and fear for the loss of their values and beliefs. To illustrate the truth of this one has only to observe the literature under study, in particular the case of Jeena, the main female character in *The Marriage Market* (2006), which is almost taken to the extreme for her disownment and kidnap after her marriage to a white man as will be discussed in 4.2.3, among other instances shown in the second part of this thesis.

It is worth stating at this point that a key issue in today's Britain is the redefinition of the term British. The traditional model of the British individual as white, anglosaxon and protestant does not conform to the demands of contemporary society. As a consequence there must be a new way of seeing Britain and the choices it faces as the concept of Britishness has evolved and incorporates new elements. One of the most significant changes has been the new immigration panorama. Thus, a first wave of immigrants in the 50's and 60's, characterised by the arrival of Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Afro-Caribbeans, Irish and Chinese, has been followed by a second wave of Somalis, East Europeans, Italians, Filipinos, Portuguese, Lithuanians and Kurds registered in the 2001 census⁴. This second wave of immigration is not particular to urban areas but is mainly characteristic of rural zones and the immigrants move beyond the scope of countries that belonged to the British Empire as was the case in the former. Thus, new discussions must turn into what being British means and how difficult it might be to attain such an acceptance among some sectors of the population.

In Britain the concept of national identity has been linked to the Conservative party for its anchor in the past. While they regard Britishness as being "exclusive, nostalgic and nationalistic" (Morley and Robins 2001: 462), the New-Labour party defends it in terms of "tolerance, openness and internationalism" (ibid). The most modern wing of the party hopes that New Britain will offer an inclusive sense of community which acknowledges diversity and which matches the notion of Britain as a hybrid, multinational state (Phillips 1997, Kelly 1997). David Miller (1995: 25) in his book *On Nationality* concentrates on the difficulty to keep national identities in contemporary society. For him, a national identity "requires that the people who share it should have something in common [a common public culture]" (Morley and Robins 2001: 476) but it must embrace both the past and the present. For Bhikhu Parek (2000: 23) "British national identity has always been more diverse than it is normally imagined to be. Britain is seen as a community of communities". In all this literature the historian Linda Colley (1999) raised the question of diversity and multiculturalism and supports the idea that,

⁴ The next census will not be published until 2011.

The position of ethnic minorities in this country is a powerful argument for the enduring utility of Britishness. Unlike Englishness, Welshness or Scottishness, Britishness is a capacious concept with no necessary ethnic or cultural overtones. Consequently, large numbers of non-whites seem content to accept the label “British” because it doesn’t commit them too much.

I do not entirely agree with the author’s statement as to the books under analysis. In fact, any reader interested in the books will not come across any reference to any member of the Indian community that regards himself or herself as British, born in India and living in England, that is. Furthermore the reference as a British person of a member of the Indian community, even among the younger generations, may cause trouble. Colley’s (1999) defence of the lack of cultural overtones regarding the concept of Britishness may lead to further controversial discussion in a society like the British due to the existence of its immense social and cultural diversity. Therefore, and despite the British government’s defence of this diversity and multiculturalism this multiculturalism is divisive and accentuates the peculiarities of each ethnic group to the others. Continuing with the idea highlighted above, to the British born generations they do not conform to a particular and rigid path as the identity terminology to define themselves varies according to the degree of tension of the situation and the aim trying to be achieved with both members of their forefathers’ generation and British individuals, issue which is discussed in section 4.2.1.

What remains to be said before the end of this section is to recapitulate that this dissertation’s main approach is to observe the way the literature under study attempts to reproduce most of the patterns of behaviour expected from Indian women in a way similar to conduct books. This issue is inevitably linked to the way identity is not only formed but also shaped by external circumstances. Such a task is not autonomous but it has always been determined by the way an individual is reminded of his/her cultural values in order not to cross the dangerous threshold of what is considered right or wrong. Thus it is identity concerning oneself and concerning the other. Antaki and Widdicombe’s (1998) consider that the important question is not therefore whether someone can be described in a particular way, but to show that and how this identity is made relevant or ascribed to self or others.. Identity is characterised by “the *lack* of

wholeness which is “filled” from *outside us*, by the ways we imagine ourselves to be seen by *others*. (Hall, 1992: 287) Even the surrounding circumstances lead the individual to the adoption of behaviour he would have never thought of before as we will see.

2.2.2 Psychological identity

What should be established at the very outset is that I will refer to the writers under analysis as British-Asian female writers and to the main character through which reality is portrayed as female characters for practical reasons. In this section I will move from an individual to a more general perspective that will focus on the social and moral weight of the community. I propose the term psychological identity (Crane 2000: 2) to approach the most personal and inner doubts of the individual as far as possible as all the sub-sections considered can not be easily and clearly divided because of the complexity of the issue at hand.

At the beginning of the chapter on identity I have mentioned the need for a definition of current Britishness. As has been pointed out my interest is on individuals of the second generation, thus born in England. Society has moved towards a more individualistic and independent view of the human being which urges a redefinition of the self. This redefinition becomes a reflexive project, in Giddens (1990) terminology, in which the self has to be shaped and create new relationships. Thus new identities come into being in order to understand themselves in relation to the others and to fit into the social and cultural milieu. This process involves a conscious project of creation of the self, the forming of oneself as a subject in Foucault's words.

The term psychological identity was used by Crane in a work on the crisis of identity in postcolonial literatures. He considered identity as being psychological, that is, we begin to construct our identity when we perceive difference or when we perceive our identity to have been eroded or diluted in some way. Pure or essential identity does not exist, because we begin to construct identity only when the process of erosion has

begun, when pure identity has already been adulterated in some way. Having come to this point it is necessary to analyse the concept of identity from different perspectives. Such perspectives are portrayed within the issues of conduct and duality.

Meena's identity, the female protagonist in *Anita and Me* (1996) is offered a ray of light with the understanding of her parents suffering, her love for Nanima who awakens her curiosity about India and the overcoming of her grandmother's departure and Robert's death,

I now knew I was not a bad girl, a mixed-up girl, a girl with no name or no place. The place in which I belonged was wherever I stood and there was nothing stopping me simply moving forward and claiming each resting place as home. This sense of displacement I had always carried round like a curse shrivelled into insignificance against the shadow of mortality cast briefly by a hospital anglepoise lamp, by the last wave of a gnarled brown hand. I would not mourn too much the changing landscape around me, because I would be a traveller soon anyhow. I would be going to the posh girls school where I would read and argue and write stories and if I wished, trample the mangy school uniform tam-o-shanter into the mud. After all, I had never promised to be good, had I?

(AM 1996: 304)

The literature under analysis is full of identity prejudices and Indian identity is taken for granted on occasions where it should not be as "Being Indian doesn't presume Indianness" (*S and S* 2003: 224). The characters from our books were not only born in a Western society but they also share and represent a set of common experiences which define British society and British citizens as we will see in section 4.2. As Stuart Hall (1987: 44) indicates, "Thinking about my own sense of identity, I realize that it has always depended on the fact of being a migrant, on the difference from the rest of you" (see section 4.2.4.1). In this same line, Lokugé (Crane 2000:17) defines self-identity "not only as one's sense of self but as constituted within the gaze of the other", this other can be applied not only to the white community but also to the members of the

Indian community, those who do not accept any behaviour beyond the foundation of their religious and cultural considerations.

For the Indian community the self includes the family and is linked to the identity of the family. In one of the criticisms made of racism and white people's hypocrisy she asserts her desire to be herself; she did not want to be like anyone else but herself;

Her boat was adrift in life's ocean and sometimes the tide of England pulled her one way and at other times the tide of England pulled her the other way. But she was English; practically born, bred and fed in this country. Her loyalties varied depending upon how life was treating her. Today, life in England felt crap and India called with a loud voice. Tomorrow, life could be cool, and her ears would be deaf to India. Taking the best of both worlds was a juggling act all British-born Asians learned swiftly.

(P and P 2004: 294)

This passage exemplifies the dual identity crisis suffered by British born Asians, characters who tumble between two worlds and that probably given the difficulty to choose one are forced into a duality which is not exempt from its moral weight and conflict with the members of the Indian community. Thus, this inner conflict will be common in all the books and to all the characters.

2.2.3 Identity and social duty

As Indira Parikh (1989: 188) has pointed out "They [women] have lived with the underlying pathos of being prisoners of the definitions and boundaries prescribed by the cultural lore". In most cases, their identity or the way it is allowed to be felt is the result of the ambiguous bridge between past and future. The first excuse used by the father when his son tries to break with the expectations made on him is that

We haven't travelled from India to be treated as a lower caste.

(*S and S* 2003: 122)

as a proof of the cultural restrictions; only members of the same caste can get married due to the social duty. As Lannoy (1971: 112) pointed out "Family, caste, and religion acknowledge the helplessness of the individual and the power of the group."

As has been indicated at the beginning of the thesis, identity is under a constant process of transformation; it cannot be considered to be one but it is continuously modified and shaped not only by our experience but also by our personal doubts and uncertainties. In Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* (1998) Virmati does not want to be like her mother. Therefore she is aware of the importance to know your past to understand your present and go into the future, and the refusal and desire to get involved in political activities (put an end to the traditional role of women by the adoption of a more active role).

2.2.4 Identity and peer friendship

According to Berzoff (1989: 54) "peer relationships, especially female friendships, are valuable sources of self-knowledge and identity development for girls". Good friendship relationships, like good family relationships, are ones in which the members not only tell everything but in which they also talk and share what they feel about it (See *LHH* 1999, *PandP* 2004). As I will observe as the dissertation proceeds, in the two novels indicated above friendship relations are betrayed and conditioned by the characters' behaviour and gender identity. Marina and Emily's friendship in *Passion and Poppadoms* (2004) is gradually fading in the process of conquest of Thomas' love, the conquest of a white man, a behaviour totally prohibited for an Indian woman. Nevertheless, every lie in the process is justified with destiny and her reliance on her grandmother's wisdom, in a way that the weight of tradition is used by Marina in order to accomplish one of her aims in life, the love of a rich white man beyond social and cultural barriers. Therefore, and as advised by her grandmother, according to whom throwing water from the Ganges over the desired man could bring him into loving you,

as “picking the right would help in a happier life” (*P and P* 2004: 147), and as a perpetuation of tradition, after her grandmother had died, she had to “go down to the Ganges after she had been cremated and scattered over the sacred river”, fill a bottle with water and throw it over Thomas’ head. However, and contrary to her decision not to let her parents know until much later in time, she had to receive the blessings of her elders. The same decision violates her friendship with Emily in the lying of her whereabouts. Being conscious that she should not have lied she justifies it with destiny again and tells Emily about her grandmother’s advice; it was her “destiny calling” (*P and P* 2004: 145), an ironic remark on one of the most consistent beliefs in Indian thought, fate. In her ironic violation of an Indian law she is also fully aware of her play with tradition and the use of this irony as a strategy to justify her actions.

2.2.5 Identity in symbolic time and place

The influx of immigrants to London has been constant since the end of the II World War. Authors such as the anthropologist Sheila Patterson (1965) and John Eade (2000) analysed the changes in London as a consequence of the arrival of numerous immigrants as indicated at the beginning of this chapter. For the latter, “Black and Asian settlers from former British colonies have played the major part in creating London’s multicultural society” (2000: 2).

The identity crises suffered by most of the British-Asian female characters are partly portrayed in the inner battle between the country that saw them be born and grow and a *distant* India. Somehow paradoxical is that the latter becomes the emblem through which the characters find an anchor that bestows them with perspectives of a complex past in India but an India that offers them the inner psychological peace in need. Thus the references to India are portrayed as a resource to solve problematic situations, the psychological conflict from the dual and separated reality in which they live. An instance can be traced in *The Marriage Market* (2006), a novel in which the older generations try to send Jeena, the female protagonist, to India to be married as a punishment for having been caught having sexual relationships with a white man,

Aaron, in Britain. According to her parents in England and relatives in India, she had lost all sense for respect and morals and, consequently, it was time to take her to India “for a lesson in discipline and family morals” (TMM 2006: 280), a situation expressed metaphorically as “a snake has bitten poison into this family and it needs to be sucked out” (TMM 2006: 281).

In the case of the members of the first generation they moved to England mainly in the 50s and 60s in search of a more promising future. One of the features that defines the Indians is their acceptance of the world as it is and their adaptation to it as part of life; they accept things as they are and try to live happily even in difficult and unfair situations contrary to the West; and it is also because of a cultural and religious education that they accept fate or God. Together with the struggle to start a new life, they have to face the misconceptions by their relatives in India who question not only their morals but also their attitudes. As an example, in a conversation between Naina’s father, another candidate for an arranged marriage in Minhas’ first novel, and her future father-in-law, they seem to be convincing each other of their achievements, contrary to their relatives’ wrong beliefs in an attempt to break with some stereotypes about the Indians who migrated in search for better life prospects:

‘Those relatives in India think we’ve forgotten our ways, Dad spoke loudly. We’re more Indian than they are. We may not have elephants and drums, a tour weddings, but,’ and Dad raised his finger like a soldier saluting, ‘but, we send our daughters off with good dowries that we’ve worked hard for.’
‘Yes, yes. And my relatives—’ Ashok’s dad raised his black, bushy eyebrows to the heavens— Oh jealous. So jealous. They drive around in their scooters, flagging down the rickshaw wallah and we...we drive Mercedes. But we took the risk. We got on the plane. We came to this country. We made a life. We...’

(Ch or Ch 2000: 29)

The debate turns around two clearly distinguishable poles, one the personal and economic effort to obtain good dowries and the misconceptions and prejudices regarding the Indians in England. Therefore the ludic celebrations in the subcontinent

are distant from the difficulty in the preservation of the canons of tradition and culture beyond the Indian borders despite the apparent evils and temptations of the West. It cannot be forgotten that marriage is one of the most significant phases in life and that in order to achieve a good status in marriage one of the preludes is a good dowry. So while the first generation moved to England in search of better prospects without much economic help, they became the target of a society, the British, which was not yet accustomed to the arrival of immigrants, and had to deal with issues like initial racism, displacement and misused perception as visitors that proved futile in the coming years. The second generation has to face a cultural reality which not only questions their identity but that are also forces them for natural reasons to examine options other than their parents'. Contrary to their parents' lack of initial expectations, the new generations are fully aware of the opportunities offered in and by the West,

Mum and Dad came from India- their motherland- in the sixties. They herded up their belongings, took a deep breath and plunged right in, hoping for the best, not knowing quite well what to expect. Some things they liked: the fresh air, open space, freedom. Some things they hated: the weather, no family and skinheads. But they muddled through and realised that bringing up the children in England would give them a good education and the opportunity for a richer life, so they stayed. But in their hearts they didn't feel welcome. They felt more like visitors, guests that at any time they could be booted out.

(Ch or Ch 2000: 98)

2.2.6 Community identity

In the preceding sections I tried to draw the reader's attention to the importance of identity in a multicultural society. In this case identity is not only considered from the individual but also from the collective point of view. In any cross-cultural environment the notion of identity does not only refer to what people are but also to what they do. Thus, several researchers have tried to get some crucial facts as to the way our identity is (re)defined as well as the way external factors define us against others. In the issue

under analysis, our identity will not only be regarded from a personal point of view but also from the point of view of belonging to a minority culture. We could even go a step further and analyse concepts such as *national identity* and *new identities*, that is, those that imply the contact with a different language, culture and society. In the distinction between social identity and gender identity the former can be rephrased as community identity.

In this arena I propose to oppose personal knowledge to cultural knowledge. The former refers to the role of the mind of the individual before certain events and the way the individual perceives them and the latter refers to the knowledge shared by the group. Not only can they become contradictory and enter conflict but they can also become commonplace at a particular moment and then be redefined or/and be subject to modifications fostered by social change and the mobility of the population. As will be seen later both of them will be dependent on attitude. Therefore a positive or negative attitude will determine the degree of acceptance or refusal of specific cultural values. Normally a group has a higher status. Given this situation the individual may want to become a member of the group with a higher status in order to be accepted. In the primary bibliography, while the members of the first generation keep the traditional values they took from India, the female protagonists adhere to Western values. Nevertheless it is relevant to consider that theirs is not a case of power but, and as has been indicated at some other stages and will be highlighted as the thesis develops, a result of the background in which they have been born and bred. This state of mind finds its counterpart in some isolated member of the second generation, a strict follower of the traditional Indian path represented by Kiran, Naina's brother in *Chapatti or Chips* (2000) as can be observed in 4.1.2.1.

Some of the most outstanding studies on the field of identity have been developed by people such as Hall (1992b), Crane (2000) and Hutnik (1991). Therefore I will comment on some of their most important contributions.

2.2.6.1 Hall (1992)

The meaning and significance of identity becomes really important when applied to what are generally known as *community identities*. People seem to have opposed them to national identities. A real fact about today's society is that national identities remain strong, especially with respect to such things as legal and citizenship rights, but local, regional and community identities have become more significant. Hall goes a step further and refers to the term new identities as a result of the process of globalisation the western world is subject to and states:

What these communities have in common (Afro-Caribbean and Asian communities), which they represent through taking on the "black" identity, is not that they are culturally, ethnically, linguistically or even physically the same, but that they are seen and treated as 'the same' (i.e. non-white, 'other') by the dominant culture. It is their exclusion which provides what Laclau and Mouffe call the common 'axis of equivalence of this new identity (Hall 1992b: 309).

2.2.6.2 Crane (2000)

Those who have power, the British in India, whites in Britain, men in patriarchal societies, rarely need to concern themselves with the question of identity. Conversely, those without power need to use their otherness to construct a homogenous identity as a means of empowerment. (Crane 2000: 8)

Being related to a minority group the question of power arises. Thus, although some members of the Indian community have achieved public and economic success, most of its members are still trying to find a place, both socially and politically. British born teenagers have to find a balance between their parents' heritage and their personal freedom and aspirations. At the same time parents have to cope with the daily confrontation with Western values and beliefs, which can be interpreted as a form of power. They are

[p]assing through a transition period, in which they have to find solutions to situations that result from living and working in a British culture and environment. The most significant of these are caused by racism, discrimination, by isolation, being single mothers and as unmarried women, drinking and, to a lesser extent, smoking and taking drinks (Rait 2005: 86).

As a result, their identity is constantly reminded of it as a result of the complex gender relations stemming from duality and hybridity.

2.2.6.3 Hutnik (1991)

He identified four strategies of self-identification in an attempt to explicate the type of relationships by South Asian children in Britain as regards not the relationships between the minority group and the majority group but also within the same group he belongs to:

- The dissociative strategy: where categorization is in terms of ethnic minority group membership and not in terms of the majority group membership.
- The assimilative strategy: where self-categorization primarily emphasizes the majority group dimension and denies ethnic minority roots. This would be the case of the main character in *Bindis and Brides*, *Passion and Poppadoms* or *The Marriage Market* in which the female characters react according to the Western code and not the Indian one, in spite of its interpretation as bad conduct and shame on the community. In fact they do not keep quiet under any circumstance but they denounce any attempt of physical abuse, unfaithfulness or impossibility to act in accordance with the individual's own desires.
- Acculturative where individuals categorize themselves approximately equally in terms of both the above dimensions.

- Marginal where neither dimension is important or salient to self-categorization. There may be a conscious decision not to choose an ethnic identity or a majority group identity.

2.3 Stereotypes

2.3.1 State of the art

In an interview by Shelina Begum for the *Asian News* on 1st June 2005, *We're not that bad, Minhas* the issue of stereotypes was raised. According to the writer "It is important to use stereotypes so readers can relate to the characters" and as she also stated,

I picked out problems that do exist in the Asian community and therefore it was necessary to use some stereotypes. If I had a working class white man as a character for example, and he spent his days wearing a suit and coming straight home from work, people won't be able to relate to him. But if he was hanging out with his mates at the pub, he'd seem more real.

Roughly speaking, we tend to classify and reduce groups and things according to certain criteria which do not always define them as what they are. Such classifications or stereotypes are normally addressed to minority groups and women as they are part of the lowest scale in the social ladder. According to Wrightsman (1977: 672) a stereotype is a relatively rigid and oversimplified conception of a group of people in which all individuals in the group are labelled with the so-called group characteristics. Lakoff talks about stereotypes by shifting between interest in women's *actual* behaviour and interest in restrictive *cultural expectations* about appropriate behaviour for women (when referring to women's language) (Talbot 2003: 33). Thus these previous considerations can be easily applied to British Asian women as they respond to the same characteristics.

Gender stereotypes are closely linked with and support gender ideologies. If we view them as ideological prescriptions for behaviour, then actual individuals have to respond to the stereotypical roles expected on them (Talbot 2003: 472). According to some psychologists, certain stereotypes are particularly strong because they are formed not by a single society but by the entire experience of mankind. A person who deliberately departs from a socially approved stereotype by playing a new role-developing a new life-style-usually must pay a heavy cost in guilt, alienation, or psychosis; tendencies toward schizophrenia may be aggravated by the person's sense of his divided self (compiled by Ferguson c1981: 4).

The establishment of normalcy (i.e.what is accepted as 'normal') through social and stereo-types is one aspect of the habit of ruling groups (...) to attempt to fashion the whole of society according to their own world view, value system, sensibility and ideology (Dyer 1977: 30). Stereotyping involves simplification, reduction and naturalisation". We type people according to complexes of classificatory schemes in our culture, in terms of the social positions they inhabit, their group membership, personality traits and so on (Talbot 2003 : 468). The stereotype as a concept of what is a typical member of a group is a very poor device in thinking (Oakes 1994: 21).

In the bibliography that concerns us here, and as will be observed in chapter 4, the attribution of specific stereotypical traits to the Indian and British-Asian individuals does not either prove their truth or respond to reality but to the attempt to ridicule the group, disguise the recognition of the qualities of the other or hide the false assumption of knowledge of the group, that is, think they know the group. In fact, our identity does not only depend on the way we look ourselves but also the way the others see us, mainly in the case of hybridity. In the British cultural context, the gradual dilution of one's own culture accentuates gender, social and cultural stereotypes. On the British side it involves the fake knowledge on the Indian community as transmitted mainly through the media, a perception that involves reduction and simplification as highlighted above as is shown in the primary bibliography and in the analysis in Chapter 4.

What we term masculine and feminine is not linked in any biological sense to being a male or a female but rather is established by society (Basow 1986: 4). As Oakes et al (1994: 209) state the relevance of stereotyping is fourfold:

- Stereotypes are social norms. They are held in common by the members of one group about another and are anchored in particular group memberships. Their character as shared, consensual beliefs is regarded by many as a defining quality (e.g. Leyens et al., in press; Tajfel, 1981). Certainly, stereotypes which are not shared are likely to be of little significance for intergroup relations (See sections 4.2.2, 4.2.4.2, 4.2.11).
- Their subjective validity (people's confidence in the degree to which they match reality) is a function of both individual reality testing and social consensus (See section 4.2.2.2, 4.2.8, 4.2.10).
- Subjective validity is a matter of the agreement of similar others, but the similarity of others will vary with the level of self-categorization. At one level, ingroup and outgroup may disagree about stereotypes without uncertainty, but at the higher level of a superordinate social identity (as members of 'civilized society', 'Western culture', 'humanity'), even ingroup and outgroup will feel the need to reach agreement and reduce the uncertainty which arises from conflict (See section 4.2.2.2, 4.2.5.1, 4.2.6, 4.2.12.2).
- The psychological processes of relative perception and the social processes of collective discussion and conflict are interdependent means of achieving valid social stereotypes, each building on and correcting the limitations of the other, as would be the case in all the issues analysed in this thesis in the coexistence of the two cultures.

I would like to highlight two basic ideas indicated by Oakes (1994: 206-7) that I consider relevant in any approach to the study of stereotypes. Firstly, what is valid for the ingroup is false for the outgroup; what is truth for 'us' is a lie for 'them'. Secondly,

stereotypes are not only cognitive products; they are also social norms, arising from processes of social influence. Having reached this point, an important notion within the field is that of social stereotypes. As Alphonse (1997: 77) points out women frequently express themselves both as individuals and as role models. Women express cultural values such as being husband-focused, family-oriented, submissive, upholding religious traditions, capable of sacrifices. They also protest against the exploitation and oppression in a male-dominated society. As Ehya Amalsaleh (2003: 88) states "in the process of socialisation, both males and females are taught how to behave and what to believe and are deeply affected by *the* norms of the community."

2.3.2 Social stereotypes

Tajfel (1981: 161) identified five basic functions of social stereotypes, two individual and three group-level functions. For the individual, stereotypes served the *cognitive* function of systematizing and simplifying the environment, and the *motivational* function of representing and preserving important social values. At the group level, stereotypes contributed to the creation and maintenance of group beliefs which were then used to *explain* large-scale social events and *justify* various forms of collective action. They were also involved in the creation and maintenance of *positive intergroup distinctiveness*, the tendency to differentiate the ingroup positively from selected outgroups- when such differentiation is perceived as becoming insecure and eroded; or when it is not positive, and social conditions exist which are perceived as providing a possibility for a change in the situation.

2.3.3 Stereotypes regarding women

The literature under analysis centres around the problems of female protagonists first and their community second, a female perspective is offered in a way that the British Asian women can express their worries and feelings as well as find an

alternative solution to their concerns through a negotiation and consensus with themselves and the society around them despite the difficulty to cope with their reality.

Popular culture for women has conventionally been concerned with representations of women (the female protagonist of romance fiction, the cover-girl on women's magazines). In this respect it is both like and unlike popular culture for men: women are invited to look at women (e. g. in girlie mags) and so are women (e. g. in women's mags); but obviously these invitations to look are different, and we may assume that the resulting experiences of looking are also different (Gamman 1988: 4).

As will be seen in Chapter 4 the roles associated with women highlighted by Alphonse (1997) above are reproduced in the literature under study despite the presence of female characters that either challenge or attempt to challenge them. In this dissertation I will defend, Tannen's (1990: 169) conception of challenge as a form of respect. While she applies it to the conversation between men and women, I defend it in the macro-context of culture clash and respect towards the self, this redefined as the female individual in the case that concerns us here, and the beginning of the end of the cultural, social and personal chains in a context of duality and hybridity.

Under this view, Chafetz (1978: 4) defined the term role as a cluster of socially or culturally defined expectations that individuals in a given situation are expected to fulfil. As the dissertation will show, the majority of female characters from the books under analysis will try to avoid such stereotypes no matter what the people around them consider to be the appropriate thing to do. As a consequence the roles of mother, housewife, children and husband will be constantly questioned. Relevant was also Mc Tighe Musil's (1990: vi) consideration regarding the challenge of the 90's, "to hold on simultaneously to these two contradictory truths: as women, we are the same and we are different".

The slow but steady changes in cultural, social and economic patterns of life have expanded and altered the nature of reality for women (ibid 19). It is generally assumed that it is the Western woman who represents the liberated woman. Thus one

wonders why this important aspect of a woman's life - the necessity and attempts of women to gain financial independence - does not receive the importance and emphasis it deserves, even in the novels of women writers (Bai 1996: 23).

2.3.4 Mary Anne Ferguson and her *Images of women in literature*

In her compilation *Images of women in literature* (c1981: 6) Mary Anne Ferguson points out the main roles traditionally attributed to women. I have included them as they can be exemplified with the images of British Asian women in our books:

2.3.4.1 *The mother*

Images of women in literature have always been ambivalent. The role of mother is ambiguous. Myths about woman's dual nature are attempts to explain primordial reactions to her double role as a giver, life and death, of pleasure and pain. Cameron (1992) and Talbot (1998) have pointed out that the male and the female interactional styles would equip them perfectly for traditional roles. After all, the nurturant supportive behaviour characteristic of the female interactional style is just what is needed to be a good mother.

2.3.4.2 *The wife*

Both in life and in myth, the roles of mother and wife overlap. A wife performs many of the functions of the mother; not only her children but her husband require her attention as cook and nurse. For the husband, the very qualities desirable in a good mother -firmness, decisiveness, ability to organize time- seem undesirable in a wife. A submissive wife, happy to be supportive and *to stay in her place* is the ideal; a dominating wife is ridiculed or hated. In our case this old stereotype is repeated in the older generations, individuals who moved to England but who refused to adapt to the host culture and that oppose the prevalence of the Western code among the younger

generations, except, as will be analysed, in case of their daughters' rape or psychological mistreatment by their husbands, or even as happens in *The Marriage Market* (2006) when a member of the host community makes the Indian parents realize that happiness plays a more important role than tradition with his acts (See section 4.2.3).

2.3.4.3 *The mistress seductress*

Despite the fact that public acknowledgment of extramarital relationships has in many societies been disapproved of, the mistress has been admired for her power; her ability to seduce, her overwhelming attractiveness, exonerates the male for succumbing to her (Ferguson c1981: 7).

Although Ferguson does not refer to prostitutes as such, it is worth saying that to Roy (c1998: 91), the prostitute is obviously, the most literal figure of exchange in a sexual economy which is also intimately linked to an economy of disguise and mimicry. She becomes one of the primary counters in the circulation of information, identity and homosocial power. It is her presence -that of the carnal and completely embodied female figure- that facilitates the overt disavowal of all femininity in national space, including the maternal model of femininity and nationness (the mother, of course, signifying a disembodied but nonetheless gendered subject). Thus, through the prostitute, the domain of heterosexuality is also invoked and repudiated. However, in the novels under study greater British Asian women will attempt to achieve a greater success in life than their counterparts in India and England, responsibilities that in most cases go beyond husband and children.

2.3.5 Challenging the stereotypes

2.3.5.1 Independence

According to the *Laws of Manu*, the canon law of Hinduism, Chapter 5 (idea also referred to in Chapter 9 rule number 3), 148, in childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons; a woman must never be independent. She must not seek to separate herself from her father, husband, or sons; by leaving them she would make both (her own and her husband's) families contemptible (Chapter 5, 149).

In reward of such conduct, a female who controls her thoughts, speech, and actions, gains in this life highest renown and in the next world a place near her husband. (Chapter 5, 166). According to these laws females' independence is not permitted and accepted thus it will become another element of conflict and distortion from the established law. The outcomes will be as varied and diversified as the different manifestations of such independence, that is the creation of one's own space from the beginning as an individual, even after marriage, and during marriage through an active participation in either political activities as is the case in Kapur's works or by taking part in conferences and associations helping women in need in England as in Syal's (*LHH* 1999). This individuality crashes against the Indian ideal of the community. Contrary to individuality and personality, defence humility is highly appreciated.

According to Lau (2000: 77) regarding the Indian ideology, "our natural tendency of attachment to the sense of self (self-grasping or self-cherishing) produced by the illusory processes is the root cause of all our suffering". She argues that any attempt to be oneself will always be in conflict if those processes clash with your elders. In order to overcome this conflict some measures need be taken. However, it is not easy to cut through these illusory processes and an extra effort is needed in every aspect of life, ranging from meditative practices to getting on with extended family life. The natural tendency of love is to flow towards one's own husband, wife, child and so on. This can easily break an extended family into nuclear families. An extended family can survive

only if this love is redirected across nuclear boundaries by transcending narcissistic tendencies. Consequently it would break one of the pillars of Hinduism; the affection of the Indian child extends not only to his parents but also to his grandparents and the relation between distant generations (Parikh 1989, Sharma 2004).

2.3.5.2 Education versus marriage?

First of all, for Greek thought it was considered that when a person had received an education he was ready to respond to the social, moral and sexual demands made on him. This can be interpreted as being related to Indian thought according to which women are beginning to be allowed to receive an education but not as an end in itself but as a means for the achievement of marriage. The female characters in our books feel pressed to choose between the two as in chapter 4. As I will see in section 4.2.12.2.3, education is regarded, as has been noticed above not exclusively from schooling but from the point of view of university of life, experience- the result of everything that happens around us and that form our identity. As Hanif Kureishi points out in *My Heart of hearts* (2004: 5),

Thinking about this now, I can't help but find it odd that for me 'education' always meant reading, the accumulation of information. I never thought of it (talking about education) in terms of experience, for instance or feeling or pleasure or conversation.

As the reader will see, the second generation British-Asian teenagers are aware of the new opportunities offered to them through education as with education comes freedom. In spite of this, the contradiction between the opportunities and tradition become the pillar for further conflict. As María Mies clearly puts it in *The image of Woman in the Novels of Shashi Desphande* (Sandhu 1991: 43):

The career woman has not only to face the opposition of her surroundings and to struggle against many objective obstacles, but she is often divided in herself because she also often subscribes to the Indian idea of womanhood. Her problems

arise, firstly, from the contradictions between this image and the demand of a new social situation and then from the discrepancy between new aspirations and lack of opportunity.

As far as knowledge in Sikhism is concerned, the main points gathered by the different gurus are as follows,

- Ignorance hinders progress (Kabirji, Asa Rag),
- The ignorant man wastes his valuable life, and cuts at his own roots (Guru V, Gauri Rag)
- The more one reads, the more agitated one becomes (Guru I, Asa Rag)
- The house of wood is on fire from all sides,
The Pandits are burnt to ashes;
The fools have saved their lives by running away.
(Kabirji, Shlokas) ⁵

Marriage is not only considered as the aim in life but also one of the most controversial issues in gender relations mainly in the case of the choice of a couple of a different caste. Marina's family

[...]was ripping up the rules of marriage generation by generation.

(P and P 2004: 185)

Contrary to tradition, Marina's parents married against their parents wishes. In spite of belonging to different castes, as her mum belonged to a lower caste than her dad, and as a consequence being less pure and worthy,

They had leapt the chasm of the caste system.

(P and P 2004: 185)

And questioned the roots of the caste system,

⁵ For more information See <<http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/quotations/>>

Who defined the store chart of the Indian caste system? Why is one shade of skin more acceptable than another?

(*P and P* 2004: 185)

The answer to this question had always been the same, *tradition*, regardless of whom they married.

In the next chapter the focus of interest is in the literary production from colonial times onwards in an attempt to revise the terminology used to include the literature written by Indian authors. This revision continues with a compendium of the literature being currently published in England as far as British Asian born writers are concerned and a list of new literary projects aimed at the knowledge and spread of works by Asian writers. Before continuing I would like to highlight the fact that the data provided are not free from a few contradictory results, similar to the complexities that I already mentioned in the introduction in the attempt to analyse the situation of the female characters in a multicultural society and that I will approach more closely in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 3

A NEW LITERARY AWAKENING

The aim of this chapter is not to write about the history of literature but to approach the literary panorama and the terminology utilised in an attempt to better place the books by the female writers, target of this work, born and brought up in England. These objectives, together with the latest projects aimed at the knowledge and spread of new Asian and British Asian writers in England, will allow us reach some concluding remarks.

3.1 The problematic nature of categorization

First of all and in order to approach the definition of the object of study it is relevant to walk through its historical background. The 1980's, a decade that may seem distant to us in time, constitutes the first steps to one of the most controversial but also significant changes in contemporary British society first, and then in its literature second, that is, the publication of books by female writers outside India, more specifically, women born in England who attempted to spread their voices as British citizens beyond their parents' Indian/Asian heritage. Throughout time the production of a new literature has led critics to try to catalogue it and make it fit within specific patterns. Indian literature has not been alien to this tendency and as a consequence it is necessary to refer to the terminology used to define the works by Asian writers, the criticism developed, and to the last books published on contemporary British literature.

As I will argue, the last writers and critics on the issue include the term 'Contemporary Black British literature' in their works, which is nothing else but one more controversial grain to the issue that concerns us here, the analysis of the books by Meera Syal, Nisha Minhas and B. K. Mahal, the majority of which have been published from 2000 onwards.

In the introduction I outlined the lack of bibliography on British-Asian women writers with the exception of Meera Syal. Not only is it difficult to gather some information on the female writers under study in the last publications on British literature but the researcher also encounters a few contradictory issues; among them, the

variety and complexity of the terminology to refer to the latest literary production. The nomenclature associated with the literature produced both outside and within the British boundaries, and within this, I include the old British colonies, is of the most diverse nature: 'Anglo-Indian', 'Indo-Anglian', 'Indo-English', 'Indian-English', 'South-Asian' and even 'Black', as applied to the Asian community in Britain. This ambiguity is as confusing as the nature of the Indian population. As Walvin (1984: 153) maintains, Indians cannot easily be labelled as one neat group, as the host society would not doubt like to see it, which comes anywhere near representing the extraordinary complexity of Indian society. Indians come to Britain from all over the vast sub-continent and inevitably reflect the rich diversity of language, religion, caste and region of their homelands. Their sense of identity clearly has its roots in the commitment to the Indian political and national framework and in the common experiences they share when confronted by the obstacles of the white host society. But such forces for collective identity are, again, normally transcended by stronger, more specific attachments.

On a general level people tend not to differentiate the different groups and communities in India despite the crude popular awareness of the differences between India, Pakistan and, more recently, Bangladesh; they tend to lump together people from all over the sub-continent into the misleading and inaccurate term, Indian. The term 'Indian' is primarily applied to those writers who live and publish their works in India but not to the ones that live and work abroad. Nevertheless, it comes in useful to have a brief look at the different labels provided and to finish with the names attributed to them over the last years. In order to achieve this aim I will follow Alphonse's (1997: 21) classification who points out that Indian writing has been designated by different names:

- *Anglo-Indian*. It refers to the literature produced by Englishmen born in India, while on active service in India or during their trips to India but essentially recounting their Indian experience. This would include authors such as E.M. Forster, Rudyard Kipling, Sir Edwin Arnold or John Masters. The term has also been used to include Indian writers in English by authors such as Bhupal Singh and George Sampson.

- *Indo-Anglian*. It is used to describe Indian creative writing in English. Meenakshi Mukherjee restricts the use of the term to include only the writings of those who are Indian and have written in English. She excludes all the translated into English even when the translation is done by the author himself.
- *Indo-English*: the subject matter concerns India and the English language used as a medium of expression.
- *Indian-English*: Indian-English constitutes one of the many streams of Indian literature and it is an inevitable product of the nativization of the English language to express the Indian sensibility.

To this name I should include the term ‘South-Asian’, introduced in Britain in the 70’s to distinguish Britain’s Black and Asian populations. The use of this term “seems to make sense when viewed from within a context such as Britain, an environment in which ethnicity has frequently been falsely homogenized” (Stein 2004: 6).

By the end of the 80’s and the beginning of the 90’s there was heated discussion in Great Britain about the association of the adjective *black* with the Asian community. This term, originally applied to people from Africa and the Caribbean, is “a politically and culturally *constructed* category, which cannot be grounded on a set of fixed trans-cultural, or transcendental racial categories and which therefore has no guarantees in nature” (Procter 2003: 268). While for some citizens it was not appropriate to refer to the Asians as black for its implication of discrimination and as the result of the racism of the host community; for others it was received as a question of “Black solidarity” (Bauman 1996: 165), that is, as the preservation of their cultural heritage. Such controversy led to the publication of a continuous flow of articles in *The Gazette*, a major West London weekly newspaper.

As can be observed, the classification above fails to include the works by writers who either settled or were born in Great Britain, USA or Australia and that talk about

the British-Asian born. The former, that is the authors born in Asia but settled in Great Britain, were considered by Emmanuel S. Nelson in his work *Writers of the Indian diaspora: A bio-biographical sourcebook*, published in 1993. It contains a list of the so-called writers of the Indian diaspora, as the title indicates. Despite the fact that the term is not of new creation, it is becoming a key matter in any approach to current British literature or study of gender in books by authors of Asian background. He includes 58 authors among whom we can find Hanif Kureishi but no mention is made to Meera Syal, for logical reasons; she had not yet published her first novel *Anita and Me* (1996). The term Indian diaspora, although “less reactive term than third world and more specific than postcolonial acknowledges the difference among large blocks that are otherwise lumped together as others -such as Indian, African, Chinese, and Caribbean- while being rightly demarcated as a field separate from literature produced within India” (Nelson 1993: 14).

It was not until 1989 that a preliminary survey of postcolonial criticism appeared. In 1993, the same year as Nelson’s publication, Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman published *Colonial discourse and Post-colonial Theory*. This led to the emergence, interest and development of criticism on questions such as race, migration and ethnicity together with its cultural and within the latter, its literary heritage in the academic field and it has become an integral part of the British curriculum, contrary to the 1960’s when its appearance was exceptional. A year after the survey Hanif Kureishi published his work *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), which followed the “American tradition of children-of-immigrant assimilation and resistance stories” (English 2006: 92). The importance given to this field may be noticed in the publication of journals such as *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, *Ariel*, *The Journal of New Literatures in English and Non -‘dedicated’ journals*, devoted to the critical and scholarly study of postcolonial literature, commonwealth literature and new literatures in English, including articles on Shashi Deshpande; Brontë, Astley, Sullivan, Singapore thrillers, and ‘Writing the Caribbean, on new South Asian writing or Salman Rushdie among others; the proliferation of conferences, publishing (important institutional developments outside the university) with Heinemann, Longman, Routledge. Later, I came across the concept of colonial discourse analysis in Moore-Gilbert (1997: 8)

which refers to the relationship between literature and other fields to which it is interrelated, such as history, politics, sociology and other art forms.

In its issue 7 (1983), the magazine *Granta* considered Martin Amis (1949), Julian Barnes (1946), William Boyd (1952), Kazuo Ishiguro (1954), Ian McEwan (1948), Salman Rushdie (1947) and Graham Swift (1949) as the best young British writers, without any race criterion. This list was extended with the inclusion of two new British authors in 1993, Hanif Kureishi (1954) and Tibor Fisher (1959) (*Granta, Best of Young British Novelists*, 43, 1993). According to an article published in *El País* by J. A. M,

[...] se convierten en el mainstream de la ficción británica, en un grupo de canónicos posmodernos, en la medida en que releen con ironía la tradición y en que son poscoloniales, y de artistas multiculturales que van juntos a la guerra contra el cliché, que son buenos, increíblemente buenos, y que han devuelto la gloria a la narrativa británica porque sus obras ganan el Booker Prize, el Whitbread y otras muchas medallas que se cuelgan como almirantes de la flota literaria, se traducen de forma compulsiva y venden mucho porque se las ingenian para explicar historias comerciales con narrativas de calidad.

Although it is not the object of this study and the source of interest lies beyond this issue, postcolonial criticism has contributed to the interrogation of received distinctions between high and popular culture which has been such a feature of cultural criticism more generally in recent decades (See Easthope 1991, Alphonse 1997 and Storey 2006).

According to Anna Rutherford (1994: 12) criticism is concerned with the analysis of cultural forms which mediate, challenge or reflect upon the relations of domination and subordination -economic, cultural and political- between (and often within) nations, races or cultures, which characteristically have their roots in the history of modern European colonialism and imperialism and which, equally characteristically, continue to be apparent in the present era of colonialism. She also (1994: 32-33) suggests the degree to which the category Commonwealth has now been subsumed into the postcolonial field for several reasons and by the waning importance of the

Commonwealth as a political grouping in recent years. The declining prestige of the category Commonwealth literary studies has been accelerated by the hostile attitude of a number of writers who might have been deemed suitable for inclusion within its remit. This last comment is one more attempt to group things in-group in a way they miss their personality.

The Pakistani leading political thinker, cultural critic and analyst Fauzia Ahmad's *In theory* (1992) suggests that postcolonial theory is simply one more medium through which the authority of the West over the formerly imperialized parts of the globe is currently being re-inscribed within a neo-colonial 'new world order' and is, indeed, best understood as a new expression of the West's historical will to maintain power over the rest of the world (Rutherford 1994: 18).

The fact that the readership of Indian-English literature is to a large extent bilingual, together with the fact that most writers themselves are bilingual writers - active in both languages or passive in one of the two, or they alternate between the two, makes it a bilingual literature. It is necessary to take into account the peculiar character of Indian-English fiction as essentially bilingual, bicultural, upper class, socially restricted, linguistically cut off from the on going concerns of Indian society, and pan-Indian literature of migration, which has acquired legitimacy due to its institutionalization, while reviewing its achievements during the last decade (Bharucha 1994: 11). We could even go a step further and include the concept of pan-literature.

Regardless of the name the fact is that the novels by the authors under analysis, as well as by many others "give voice to what being 'British' has come to mean, and from an angle no longer one of the immigrant periphery but of the post-immigrant frontline and beyond" (Lee 1995: 76). This does not deny the difficulty hidden in the attempt to classify the female writers in this thesis within a specific group. Nevertheless any tendency towards characterization can lead us into the error of lumping all writers into a viewpoint by trying to include them in any literary trend, or even one that has not really been created. Our writers seem to be moving in a similar direction. However, and in spite of this, it is highly dependent on the readership it is addressed to.

3. 2 Present day situation

3.2.1 The increasing presence of women

In 1982 a conference held at the Commonwealth Institute in London was one of the first conferences in Britain on Asian writing in English. No Asian women writers were invited to speak nor were any in the audience. This stood as one of the many contradictions in the literature of the time as most of the books published in the 1980's were the work of Asian British women. Conversely, the writers referred to in critical reviews and academic discussions following the conference were almost always male, V. S. Naipul and David Dabydeen (Hand 1994), Farrukh Dhondy (Hand 1994) and Hanif Kureishi- half Pakistani and half English who, for better or for worse, had assimilated to the mainstream via postmodernism and postcolonial theory. These writers tried to defend a felt Englishness through their British Asian insight and his brought about new aspirations from the search of their cultural and geographic roots to an increasing interest in identity, race and class.

In 1995 another conference was held in London under the title 'Writers of the Asian Diaspora in Britain'. Contrary to the meeting in 1982, now the history and the past histories of Asians living in Britain became central and women as well as male writers across the generations, from Attia Hossain to Prafulla Mohanti, Sharan Jeet Shan, Ravinder Randhawa and the new young Asian-British writer Atima Srivastava, were in dialogue together on the same panel; writers who had to "go through the pangs of adjustment" in Suárez's words (1999: 124). The emphasis with Anglo-writers was primarily on changes in class structure, ignoring completely the "diversity introduced into British society by the racially and culturally different immigrants" (ibid 124). Therefore, not only are women writers beginning to be represented in an institutionalised sphere but the proof of the growing interest, relevance and vitality of the Asian communities in England can be exemplified with *ImaginAsian and SALIDAA*, part of the new projects, publications and vitality in British Asian writers and their contributions to contemporary British literature. Within this background we should include not only the female authors being studied in this dissertation but also the list of

female authors given in the list of recently published books who have been publishing their first novels during the elaboration of this thesis and who go beyond the scope of our written work. While the current British literary field is being given a new light with the production by British Asian female writers, dissemination between England and the rest of the British Isles is also characterising the richness of each, to the detriment of a more globalised perspective and the association of writers within the British mainstream without regional peculiarities. This has contributed to regionalism as a new defining concept in contemporary literature in Great Britain as shown in the following section.

3.2.2 Regionalism and multiculturalism

The two traits that define contemporary British literature are regionalism, that is, the literature from Wales, Scotland and Ireland as opposed to England, and its multiculturalism. Thus, “the demographic basis of Britain’s social and cultural fabric has been changing radically” (Sauerberg 2001: 4). As a consequence, British literature cannot be defined in terms of homogeneity any more mainly due to the publication of books by members of the old British Empire whose parents once decided to move in search for a better prospect in life. We are under a process of “cultural transition and multiplicity in literature.” (Sauerberg 2001: 6).

Whereas in the beginning writers were concerned with the question of ethnicity, nowadays, and without forgetting this, their interest turns around issues regarding gender, family and identity, not so much in their community but as individuals. Schoene-Harwood said, rightly in my view, that “ethnicity is likely to remain an issue in Black and Asian British literature as well as in literary studies” (1999: 56). This has proved to have been true and I venture to state that this statement will remain true in the immediate future as can be deduced from the new literature under publication, of which I include a list in this chapter. This new literature constitutes a challenging, enriching and still undiscovered field in a relatively quick process of change which is affecting not only the literary production but also the other arts.

Contemporary British literature is characterised by “the forces of devolution, regionalism and post colonialism and, the emergence of multicultural and hybrid British identities” (English 2006: 65). The latter is the driving force and *raison d’être* of our authors. Therefore, their worries do not match the books by the so called postcolonial writers like Salman Rushdie, or even more recently Hari Kunzru whose colonial ideas are far from the inner voices of women on a continuous struggle for being both a woman and, as such, victims of the harsh social constraints imposed on them. If in the former authors the reader can notice the significant presence of the past and the domination of the British over the people in India during the colonial past, in the latter there is a look towards the future. Nevertheless, a complete break with the past cannot be fully established as they are the consequence of laws and conventions, both social and religious that have coexisted for centuries.

This term [postcolonial writer] and others that preceded it (New literatures, Third World, Commonwealth and the truly clumsy Emergent literatures- which all had their heyday and still have a currency) express the tentativeness with which liberal institutional discourse has described and named, a cultural difference which is constructed by wide-ranging and aggressive narratives on hierarchy and power (Galván and Bengoechea 1999: 29).

The denial of a new air in British literature proves futile as would the attempt to present a history of British literature that could deny the complexity in the study of the concerns by the new writers.

3.2.3 Winds of change: British born and bred

At the beginning of the present chapter I pointed out some of the terms used to name Asian writers from the colonial period onwards and, along the path, the role played by British-Asian women writers in contemporary British literature, and consequently, in the new perception of British society as a whole has become crucial.

In the new context the literature written by Meera Syal, Nisha Minhas and B. K. Mahal cannot be considered to belong to any of the groups indicated, not even within the group of postcolonial writers as I will explain with the exception of Meera Syal. Before achieving this aim it is necessary to examine the most recent academic publications on contemporary British literature, the media reception and also the media's reception of them. In this phase some publishing houses are also crucial in spreading awareness of the new female writers.

As regards academic publications, the most recent work relevant to my research, *A concise companion to contemporary British fiction* (2006), edited by James F. English, includes Commonwealth literature, later referred to as Post-Colonial, and which led to the continuous flow of the so called post-colonial theories. If we consider under these headings names like Hari Kunzru's –author of *The Impressionist* (2002), *Transmission* (2005), regarded as exotic with his novels set in former colonies– and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2004) –labelled as domestic and on the lives of the immigrant–, their concerns are in many respects far from Syal's, Minhas' and Mahal's as we will see.

Some authors like Alison Donnell (2002) or, more recently, Mark Stein (2004) have used the term Black British literature¹ to refer to the literature by writers from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. More recently, Schulze-Engler (2007) approached current British literature in terms of transculturality. How should the reader first grasp the meaning of black? For Stein (2004: xii), it not only deals with the situation of those who came from former colonies and their descendants, but also with the society which they discovered and continue to shape—and with those societies left behind. The term became controversial as it made it difficult to distinguish between the literature written by blacks in Britain and the writers from Asia. Consequently, not only do we need to redefine what being British means but also redefine the contemporary British literary production within the so many times repeated concept of duality. The author also

¹ The category 'British Asian' came into use since the Commission for Racial Equality recommended it to refer to the Asian immigrants in Britain. It replaced the term "black" which was no longer accepted for its racial implications. As can be observed, the new publications are going back in time and taking some of old controversial terminology.

focuses on the black British novel of transformation. As he states it “is about the *formation* of its protagonists—but, importantly, it is also about the *transformation* of British society and cultural institutions” (Stein 2004: xii).

The novel *Anita and Me* (1996) has been considered as immigrant literature, for the emphasis is firmly on the country of arrival. Meena will always be far more English than she is Indian; the question is, how far can she succeed in being Indian too? (Dunphy 2004: 649). Other authors, and looking again at the concept of formation maintained above, have considered it as a 20th century version of the *Bildungsroman* or novel of formation (Shoene-Harwood 1999, Tofantsuk 2007). A close look at the definition of the concept *Bildungsroman* determines that it is

a story of single individual’ s growth and development within the context of a defined social order (...), a search for a meaningful existence within society (...) His aim is to get ‘developed’ (mature, or educated) enough to fit into the social framework as a distinct individual, yet part of the system (qtd Hader 1996, Victorianweb.org).

At the end the individual becomes an integral and stable personality, which contradicts Schoene-Harwood’s comment on the traditional *Bildungsroman* and the lack of change in the personality of the individual at the end of the novel. After this passage some questions arise. Does not Sushi, the female protagonist in *The Pocket Guide To Being An Indian Girl* (2004) search for a meaningful existence with society? Does she not intend to get developed to fit into the social order? One of the reasons for the elaboration of the rules is exclusion as she does not feel part of the social and cultural pantomime around her and any difficulty in coping with her immediate surroundings. Her vision of the Indian woman expands and is not limited to a traditional arranged marriage, which obviously causes a confrontation with her elders. Regardless of the terminology used to classify these novels; all of them intend to portray the changing image of Britain and the need for a re-definition of Britishness.

As a response to the superficial need to make something cohere with the immediate surroundings, it does not succeed in the inclusion of all the writers. While

the acceptance of the term postcolonial becomes ambivalent, others labelled as “minority-identified” British writers have rejected it (...) for its inadequate political scope (English 2006: 94). As the same author reflects in his study on contemporary British fiction, “they feel it [the term “minority-identified” British writers] exerts excessive political demands that do not reflect their own local realities or literary priorities” (*ibid* 94). One might reasonably suppose that a redefinition of the term should also be considered as a direct consequence of the continuous flow of new writers.

As I will observe in Chapter 4 through the analysis of their works, the female writers under analysis do not consider the colonial period as the starting point in their novels. The characters concerned are already members of British society by birth and although they have to coexist with the British population their situation is distant from Hari Kunzru or Monica Ali. They do not have to adapt as their parents had to. A very interesting study on Indian-English fiction was published by Nilufer E. Barucha in 1994, *Indian-English fiction 1980-1990: an assessment*. He refers to the fact that literatures do show an outward growth in response to the needs created by their institutionalized teaching (Barucha 1994: 7). We should probably move a step forward and not include our works as post-colonial but as a *new* movement in literature in which women try to project their own voices while showing the still changing diversity of contemporary British society and regardless of the apparent need to impose a name on them.

The discourse of the new writers is to make the world know about their reality in a process of questioning their parents’ and their own background. The attempt to be themselves not as either British-Asian or simply British but as individuals with a right to their own happiness crashes against tradition and culture limitations. Their inappropriate conduct to the older generations’ eyes becomes the message through which they can let their parents be aware of the existence of options other than the norms in their limited outlook. These options are as natural and valid as any other. In the introduction to this dissertation I have already highlighted the role of literature as a representation of reality.

While postcolonial writers were concerned with “political struggle, racism and second language” (Hand 1994: 82), the female characters’ parents are concerned, in rough terms, with the reconstruction of their lives, acceptance by the host community on their arrival to Britain and the preservation of their tradition and culture beyond India. The new female writers under study are more concerned with gender relations among the members of the two communities and aspects more directly connected to the development of the individual such as sexuality and the psychological doubts and crisis implied as shown in Chapter 4. The thematic foci would be identity struggle and the weight of the community, the clash between tradition and the new, a constant conflict with the harsh realities of a dual context, the harshness of the decision making process and the difficulty of choice with all its implication from the white and the Indian perspective, the approach to marriage and divorce, racism and sexuality.

Together with the renovation of the literary panorama we also assist to reach a new literary market with a lot to say. This issue was addressed in an interview with Monica Ali by Diran Adebayo (Nasta 2004: 349) in which they emphasise the change in the literary market and the fact that the new authors are giving voice to the experiences of a second generation.

Adebayo: “Do you think that things are much better in Britain now in terms of works by non-white writers which are picked up in the mainstream? Is this significant or is it a fashion? How do you see your work within that wider context?”

Ali: (...) so sadly, there are trends in publishing like everything else. I do think though that there’s something more interesting going on in terms of British Asian or black writing which is perhaps a reflection of a reality, that as the second or third generation, we’re getting into our stride.”

Adebayo: Coming of age?

Ali: (...) The truth is that we are here to stay and we’re not about to go away whether other people like it or not. There’s also the fact that a lot of the energy in contemporary writing today has not just come from black and Asian writers in Britain but from people outside, like Coetzee. That’s an interesting dynamic too.”

More recently, Julia Tofantšuk published *Construction of identity in the fiction of contemporary British women writers* (2007). In her work, she includes Jeanette

Winterson, Meera Syal and Eva Figs, so the author does not make a distinction in terms of race or origin but considers them in terms of their literary value. It stands as the first and only publication within my reach (and as far as I know on the market) in which no difference as to the females' origin is made and includes Meera Syal as a contemporary British woman writer. Having said this it cannot be forgotten that although she is regarded as part of the mainstream as indicated in the introduction and above, it is the only either old or recent publication with a more extended study on the work of the writer except a doctoral dissertation (see McClellan 2006) and a collection of essays about Salman Rushdie, Hanif Kureishi And Meera Syal (see Adami 2006) but in relation to nationess-blackness and the diaspora, respectively, which moves beyond the objective of this thesis and academic papers.

In the midst of this complexity, I cannot conclude this section without some key issues which summarise some of the main points that concern us here. Are not the authors and the female characters under study as British as any other British teenager? Have they received not only a British upbringing but also a British education? Do they not have to face the same political, social and economic situation if it also true that they cannot deny their Indianness? Such issues may and will have their defenders and detractors but the clash is presented in the form of the inner self versus the external factors façade. Now, I will offer an overview on the latest projects aimed at the knowledge and diffusion of literature written by Asian authors.

3.2.4 Current projects

Over the last few years the literary and cultural scenario has been characterised by the emergence of projects that foster the artistic production of members of minority groups highlighting literature and music. As far as my research is concerned, this dissertation includes the *Arts Council Decibel Project*, *AIM (Asiansinmedia)*, *Imaginasian*, *Kalakahari*, *Salidaa*, *Wasafiri* and the British council writers' website www.contemporarywriters.co.uk.

3.2.4.1 Arts Council Decibel Project

It is an Arts Council England initiative which works to support and raise the profile of artists of African, Asian and Caribbean descent in England. Comprising a cross art-form programme of projects and events, decibel was launched in 2003 and is funded until 2008. Diversity is one of the Arts Council's five ambitions for the arts and celebrating diversity is one of the priorities in the Agenda for 2006-2008. The *Decibel* initiative was launched in 2003 in recognition that Black and minority ethnic (BME) artists and arts organisations are under-represented in the arts. Thus it seeks to improve the representation and participation of African, Asian and Caribbean artists in the arts sector by developing the arts market, through strategic interventions. In 2005 decibel teamed up with the British Book Awards, the 'Nibbies', to present *The decibel Writer of the Year Award*. The first awarded author was Hari Kunzru, followed by Diana Evans in 2006.

3.2.4.2 Asiansinmedia (AIM)

It is an online media and current affairs magazine aimed at the publication of news and commentary on Asians in British media and how the industry relates to minority-ethnic communities. It also aims to promote further diversity in British media and frequently publish information for those looking to get into media. It also sends out a weekly email newsletter that reaches around 3,500 recipients covering almost every major media organisations in the UK. In its most recent issues it has included the writer Rashmita Patel on the publication of her second novel *Web of lies* (2008) and Sathnam Sanghera on the publication of his first book *If you don't know me by now* (2008). The first novel, *Web of lies* (2008) intends both, to advise young British-Asian girls on what steps to follow given the situation of an unexpected pregnancy, and make the public know about the reality of a situation which has been hidden for years. Therefore it attempts to show that unexpected pregnancy has also affected the Asian community and its victims have not received any type of support, moral, social or economic. The second novel *If you don't know me by now* (2008) focuses on the author's efforts to let his family know he was not going to have an

arranged marriage to a Jat Sikh girl. Like the British-female characters from the primary bibliography he had to hide his real attitude to British girls despite having been involved in arranged marriage meetings. Getting tired of his battle between his family's traditions and his girlfriend's British birth, he felt the need to write this book to make his family know about his situation and put an end to an endless number of lies not to hurt his parents.

3.2.4.3 *ImaginAsian*

It is the first major reader development campaign to raise the profile of Indic writing in three mother tongue languages using established and new reader development techniques, and also to promote Indic writers in English by introducing their work to a wider library audience.

The project links three major authorities with significant Asian communities in North West London with Leicester, one of the most culturally diverse cities in the UK. The project also brings together community partner organisations in each authority and the expertise of Book Communications, a national reader development agency to aid delivery.

.....*ImaginAsian* is designed to encourage use of libraries, increasing membership, visitors and stock use, and to link with a range of other library initiatives. It targets adults from Indic communities, who represent a significant proportion of the population in the selected four authorities:

Location	%	Population
Brent	23%	Majority Gujarati, Urdu
Harrow	17%	Majority Gujarati
Hillingdon	12%	Majority Punjabi
Leicester	35%	Majority Gujarati

Within the target communities, there is a great range of cultural diversity with different library needs. This ranges from Pakistani and Indian born communities, a large community of Asians who came to the UK as refugees from Uganda in the 1970's, combined with a large and growing population of British born young Asians who may or may not be literate in their mother tongue language. There is also religious diversity and *ImaginAsian* aims to promote reader development to both Hindu and Muslim communities and profile literature from Muslim and Hindu authors, some of the most famous names including: Akhil Sharma; Ambalavaner Sivanandan; and Ruth Praver Jhabvala (1975 Booker Prize for *Heat and Dust*).

The population figures are reflected in library membership and usage, although as with membership and issues across the board, there is a large community of non-library users that reader development projects can help to attract by:

- Using targeted, high quality promotions with booklists, leaflets, posters and banners, produced in Gujarati, Urdu, Punjabi and English, designed to raise the profile of Indic writing and encourage library users to participate in the range of Indic activities.
- Delivering a high profile programme of live literature and other events and activities across the two areas, focused on local festivals (Brent and Harrow both have an annual literature festival) Diwali and Eid, with authors appearing at events both in London and Leicester. The success of this element is ensured by the active participation of community organisations.
- Delivering a major staff development and training programme to embed *ImaginAsian* and reader development within the core library service activities. This draws on the expertise of librarians and community partners in the different geographical areas, as well as the expertise of Book Communications.
- Promoting an *ImaginAsian* reading group in each authority to complement the range of reading groups already in existence.

- Managing a web site developed to showcase *ImaginAsian* activity; this is being promoted within the profession to assist librarians and reader/literature development workers in their work with Indic language communities.

The libraries involved in this project prepared a list of titles under the label *ImaginAsian* and attached a stick to it in order to distinguish them from the other books available (See appendix for the list of English titles provided by Harrow Library, including the new titles for the spring 2002). The reader must bear in mind that this project was economically supported for a year and as regards my research and contact with some people involved in this task no further investment has been carried out.

3.2.4.4 *Kala Kahani*

Kala Kahani, a Loughborough-based South Asian arts project, invites fledgling writers based in the East Midlands to participate in a programme of activities to encourage and nurture their writing careers, funded by Arts Council East Midlands. The scheme is aimed primarily at writers of South Asian origin but also welcomes applications from writers interested in the issues around Indo-British culture and relations.

They plan to run a series of activities across a whole range of disciplines such as poetry, novel and short story writing, reportage, biography, travel writing and writing for children, all led by professional writers and teachers. They are also developing a website to become an online community for writers across the region and beyond. It offers participants on the programme the opportunity to publish their work online and space to promote themselves and their work. *Kala Kahani* works to ensure that publishing houses, literary agencies and radio producers are made aware of this resource of new talent.

In 2008, *Kala Kahani* celebrated the National Year of Reading by offering a book exchange service, with an emphasis on books by South Asian authors or South Asian subject matter, and with the objective not only to encourage people to read but also to enjoy it. Added to this, they collected and distributed books free of charge to schools and community centres.

3.2.4.5 SALIDAA

The *South Asian Diaspora Literature and Arts Archive* is a digital archive, run by the Commonwealth Institute in London, which features a wide variety of materials such as excerpts of fiction, poetry and plays, manuscripts and writers' notes, art works, photographs, leaflets, programmes of events, stage and costume drawings of theatre and dance performances, lyrics, CD and record covers, and music scores representing the substantial body of work produced by South Asian writers, artists, performers and musicians in England from 1947 to the present. It was founded in 1999 by a group of concerned academics, experts and practitioners of South Asian literature and arts in response to a widespread and growing concern that the contribution of the South Asian community to literature and arts in Britain was disappearing and becoming inaccessible primarily as a result of lack of resources. In June 2001 it obtained a grant over three years from the New Opportunities Fund (NOF), a Lottery distributor, as part of a nationwide digitization programme. The writers included in the project are Attia Hosain, Aamer Hussein, Suniti Namjoshi and Romesh Gunsekera. As far as my most recent research is concerned no information can be found on the female writers subject to study in this thesis.

3.2.4.6 Wasafiri

Wasafiri is edited by Susheila Nasta and published three times a year, in March, July and November. In nearly twenty years of publishing, *Wasafiri* has changed the face of contemporary writing in Britain. As a literary magazine primarily concerned with new and postcolonial writers, it continues to stress the diversity and range of black and

diasporic writers worldwide. *Wasafiri* remains committed to its original aims: to create a definitive forum for the voices of new writers and to open up lively spaces for serious critical discussion not available elsewhere. It is Britain's only international magazine for Black British, African, Asian and Caribbean literatures.

It is supported by a group of well known authors and critics, including Michael Ondaatje, Chinua Achebe, Caryl Phillips, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Kamau Brathwaite, Marina Warner, Nadine Gordimer, Abdulrazak Gurnah, Merle Collins, Ferdinand Denis, Bernardine Evaristo, Maya Jaggi and Amer Hussein. Writers recently featured in *Wasafiri* include Leila Aboulela, Segun Afolabi, Ama Ata Aidoo, Kamau Brathwaite, Brian Chikwava, Kwame Dawes, Anita Desai, Lorna Goodison, Bernardine Evaristo, Maggie Gee, Romesh Gunsekera, Abdulrazak Gurnah, Stuart Hall, Leena Dhingra, Chika Unigwe, Kelwyn Sole, Hima Raza, Jamal Mahjoub, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Jean Arasanayagam. The most recent concerns have been related to issues such as migrant writing in England, black British drama, the novels *Brick Lane* by Monica Ali and *The Impressionist* by Hari Kunzru or issues on cultures in contact, as a mode of example. However, no article or interview to the British-born writers included in this thesis has been the concern of any of the issues published.

3.2.4.7 www.contemporarywriters.co.uk

This database contains up-to-date profiles of some of the UK and Commonwealth's most important living writers. The site, produced by the Literature Department of the British Council, also includes writers from the Republic of Ireland that the British Council has worked with. The views expressed are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent those of the British Council.

A look at the 2007 publications on the British Council website database shows that the topics are as diverse as the origin of the writers although I only concentrate on and include in the table the writers with an Indian background and born in England. Thus,

List of writers collected in the *Asiansinmedia* Website in 2007:

Writer	Birthplace	Recent works
Dina Begum	Barking, London. Year not indicated.	<i>The landlady</i> (2007): identity, the idea of India as exotic and the ignorance and lack of knowledge on India and its culture.
Nikita Lalwani	Rajasthan, India, 1973.	<i>Gifted</i> (2007): about a young Asian girl growing up in Cardiff who is declared a maths genius and finds herself living the life of a 'prodigy' until she hits adolescence and things get confused.
Gupta Rahila	Year not indicated.	<i>Enslaved</i> (2007): shows immigration through the difficulties suffered by women from Somalia, China and India. As regards the latter, it focuses on a woman involved in a forced marriage who was starved, imprisoned and assaulted.
Atul Shah	Year not indicated.	<i>Celebrating diversity</i> (2007): on India diversity (faith, languages and culture), ignorance and disrespect and the relationship between bio-diversity and human diversity.
Sanjay Suri (male writer)	1971	<i>Brideless In Wembley</i> (2007): looks into a world of illegal immigrants, the supposed multiculturalism of Leicester. It is a bitter sweet account of an Indian in London in search of a bride, as he trawls the connections and social gatherings through which Indians (in this case Gujarati Hindus) make their matrimonial choices - no longer 'arranged' in the older sense, but 'managed' by the older generation in various subtle ways.

In this list I have only included the writers concerned with Indian issues, most of them are the target of study in this thesis, these being identity, the lack of knowledge about the Indians, multiculturalism and marriage, which is no longer expressed in terms of arrangement but in terms of management by the older generations, a fact which points to another discourse on marriage.

In the introduction I referred to the involvement of Meera Syal in the media. In the same way the new writers mentioned above their initial involvement in the media precedes their literary career. Nikita Lalwani worked at the BBC for several years directing factual television and documentaries. After receiving an MA in Creative Writing at Bath Spa University she turned her attention more fully to writing fiction. Dr. Atul Shah is an educator, social entrepreneur, scholar and broadcaster. The male writer Sanjay Suri is Europe Editor for the Inter Press Service news agency. He contributes to the CNN-IBN television channel and to *Outlook*, a weekly news magazine published in India. He studied at Stanford University, the University of Delhi and the London School of Economics. Dina Begum is writing short stories for Creative Week Newspaper.

List of writers collected in the British Council Website in 2008:

Writer's name	Birthplace	Recent Works	Contributions
Cat Weatherill	Liverpool.	<i>Junk</i> (in progress): Heroin addiction	
Graham Joyce	Keresley, near Coventry, 1954.	<i>Twoc</i> (2005): 15-year-old boy since a joyriding accident.	
Leila Aboulela	El Cairo, 1964.	<i>The translator</i> (1999) <i>Minaret</i> (2005)	
Frank Cottrell-Óbice	Liverpool, 1961.	<i>Millions</i> (2004): book for children based on his own screenplay. <i>Framed</i> (2005): books for children <i>Cosmic</i> (2008)	TV critic, film and series collaborator.

Writer' s name	Birthplace	Recent Work	Contributions
Dalit Nagra	West London. Year not indicated.	<i>Look we have coming to Dover</i> (2007): Poetry collection about the experience of British-born Indians, and often employs 'Punglish' - English spoken by Indian Punjabi immigrants.	
Redmond O'Hanlon	Dorset, 1947.	<i>Trawler</i> (2005), an account of a journey through the North Atlantic from Stromness to Greenland.	Literary criticism, non-fiction, travel books.
Ifor Thomas	Haverfordwest, 1949.	Three main collections of poetry: <i>Bogwiser</i> (1991); <i>Unsafe Sex</i> (1999); and <i>Body Beautiful</i> (2005).	Fiction poetry.
Philip Wells	Not indicated	Poems Published in literary magazines. <i>Daddy Island</i> (2001): children's book.	Performance poet who collaborates with other artists: fire jugglers, photographers, artists and musicians Opera writer componer.
Mohsin Hamid	Lahore, Pakistan, 1971.	<i>Moth Smoke</i> (2000) <i>The Reluctant Fundamentalist</i> (2007)	
Ben Haggarty	Not indicated	Working repertoire of over 350 tales for both adult and younger audiences. He is particularly interested in Eastern European Wonder tales and Bronze Age and early Iron Age epics.	He organised the 1st International Storytelling Festival at Battersea Arts Centre in 1985, then two further festivals at Waterman Arts Centre in 1987 and at the South Bank Centre in 1989.

Writer' s name	Birthplace	Recent work	Contributions
Lucy English	Sri Lanka and grew up in England. Year not indicated.	<i>Selfish People</i> (1998) <i>Children of Light</i> (1999) <i>Our Dancing Days</i> (2000)	Known as a performer poet.
Zoë Skoulding	Bradford, 1967.	Three collections of poetry <i>Parking Non-Stop:</i> performances of poetry in translation juxtaposed with field recordings as a means of exploring both acoustic and linguistic relationships between places.	He is involved in several projects combining performed poetry or lyrics with music, soundscape and film.

Out of the authors specified only one was born in England to Indian parents, one born in Pakistan and another one grew up in England. Only one author, Dalit Nagra, writes about the British-Asian experience with a different genre, poetry and most of the writers are more or less directly connected with acting, publishing or other collaborations so writing is not their exclusive activity. In opposition to the first table (*AIM*), all the writers focus on some issues concerning the Asian experience. Nevertheless and surprising as it may seem, none of the two, the British council website and *AIM*, have included Nisha Minhas.

We must acknowledge and differentiate between the literary perception and the social reception. A quick look at the undergoing literary projects shows two aspects. Firstly, most of the initiatives to foster and develop British-Asian and Asian writers stem from the Asian communities in Great Britain themselves and not from the British government and the mainstream despite the government's stress on multiculturalism. Secondly, the projects considered do not include the writers target of my study to the exception of a link to B.K.Mahal, defined as a writer for children, one more proof of the complex reality in the British context in the literary field.

In the spring 2008 *AIM* launched the first novel by Sathnam Sanghera, born to Punjabi parents in the West Midlands in 1976, *If you don't know me by now*. Despite the

fact that the focus of this thesis is female British Asian writers, this author becomes key as regards the different issues maintained in this dissertation. The book constitutes an attempt to come to terms with himself and his family to the detriment of the community, of which he is aware of the opposition. Tired of his secrets and lies and threatened by his disownment for a mixed race relationship, he writes this book to come to terms with his mother and make her friends understand the reason for his actions, which go against the Sikh code. To the question about the desire to write this book, Sanghera stated,

It was a way for me to tell my family I wasn't going to have an arranged marriage to a Jat Sikh girl. I spent a decade having arranged marriage meetings- I had more than 20- and at the same time I was having secret relationships with "unsuitable" girls, and eventually, I just got tired of the secrets and lies. It may seem an odd way of confronting one's family, but somehow it is easier to be brave when you have an audience- if I didn't confront my mother in the form of a book, I think I would have chickened out, as I had on previous occasions (AIM 18.05.2008).

Together with the writers compiled out of the AIM and the British Council databases, I include a list of books published recently by British-Asian female writers in alphabetical order by surname and which are not included on either and that are part of the new British literary market.

Writer	Book	Year	Publisher
Monica Ali	<i>Brick Lane</i>	2004	Doubleday
Monica Ali	<i>Alentejo Blue</i>	2006	Doubleday
Rajeev Balasubramanyam	<i>In beautiful disguises</i>	2000	Bloomsbury

Writer	Book	Year	Publisher
Kiran Desai	<i>The Inheritance of Loss</i>	2006	Hamish Hamilton
Roopa Farooki	<i>Bitter sweets</i>	2007	Pan
Rahila Gupta	<i>Six yards of river.</i>		
Manju Kapur	<i>Home</i>	2007	Faber and Faber
Rabina Khan(East London)	<i>Ayesha0's Rainbow</i>	2006	Fore-Word Ltd.
Rabina Khan	<i>Nari:A story of a woman</i>	(in progress)	Funded by the Arts Council
Cauvery Madhavan	<i>Paddy Indian</i>	2001	Blackamber Books
Cauvery Madhavan	<i>The uncoupling</i>	2003	Black Amber
Rashmita Patel	<i>Tina 'n' Niki</i>	2006	DTF Books
Rashmita Patel	<i>Web of lies</i>	2008	DTF Books

Writer	Book	Year	Publisher
Bali Rai	<i>(Un)arranged marriage</i>	2001	Corgi Childrens
Bali Rai	<i>Two timer</i>	2005	Barrington StokeLtd
Bali Rai	<i>The last taboo</i>	2006	Corgi Childrens
Jasvinder Saghera	<i>Shame</i>	2007	Hodder and Stoughton

Six yards of river (2007) features several stories, one about an Indian woman in a forced marriage who was starved, imprisoned and assaulted in England. *In beautiful disguises* (2000), a novel of fantasy versus reality, is set in the mind of an Indian teenager who imagines herself as Audrey Hepburn in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* while battling with the expectations of her southern Indian society. The most recently published book is *Web of lies* (2008), written by Rashmita Patel, and which focuses on Asian teenage pregnancy.

By the end of the year 2008, while I was preparing a final draft of this thesis, an interview came out in *AIM*. Its relevance to the dissertation was crucial as it concerned an interview to Rashmita Patel, a British Asian writer from Tipton (West Midlands) interested in the lives and experiences of British-Asian teenagers. Her first novel, *Tina 'n' Niki* (2006) focused on arranged marriage. Her second novel, *Web of lies*, was published in October 2008. It is about pregnancy in the same sector of the population, an issue British-Asian teenagers cannot talk about with their parents and that to the white community's astonishment it is part of the reality of the Asian community.

In Patel's webpage, <http://rashmita.org/>, she referred to some of the issues considered in this thesis and that I would like to include as part of the concluding remarks of this chapter and that can lead the reader to further thinking. As she states (AIM 18.09.2008), her reasons for writing are that:

- There were not enough novels based on Western Asian cultural and social issues.
- That Asian society was changing at a fast pace.
- To entertain teenagers to read novels with a bit of garam masala added to it.
- To innovate the current ethnic groups of similar backgrounds into more academic and educative habits which will enhance the academic achievements of those readers.
- To show different views and enable understanding, allowing equality and diversity to be expressed as the book is written in English so that not only the Asian target market can read it but other markets as well.
- The book has not been translated yet but is under review.

As maintained in the introduction, the focus of interest in the publications on contemporary British literature still lies mostly in postcolonialism and diaspora not giving place to Nisha Minhas and B. K. Mahal in the academic sphere. In the same section I also mentioned the lack of information about Nisha Minhas and B.K.Mahal in the histories of contemporary British literature, newspapers and literary projects concerning the Asian community as indicated in Chapter 3. While it is true that B. K. Mahal has only published a novel, *The Pocket Guide To Being An Indian Girl* (2004), Nisha Minhas has been part of the British literary market since the publication of her first novel *Chappatti or Chips* (2000). This lack of reception is being gradually counterbalanced by very recent and timid but real references to Minhas' works in other spheres. Two facts that support this statement are, first, the inclusion of Nisha Minhas in the list of Black and Asian British Fiction Writers compiled by Arts, Languages and Literature Service, Central Library, Birmingham, last updated in December 2008, together with Meera Syal, although no link to the writer is offered contrary to most of the other authors included. Second, the presence of some of her works in a project initiated by the BBC in 2007 under the name BBC Raw, a guide to developing better

reading and writing skills that aims to help adults across the UK read and write better makes it more accessible to the public as it is offered as one of the reference writers with a British Asian background. As part of the activities, in 2008 they held the RaW Storytelling Festivals, a chance for families to develop confidence in their storytelling skills together.

The list of book recommendations includes ten novels by writers of African and Caribbean, Chinese, Irish, Jewish and South-Asian origin, of which five have been written by the authors included in this thesis. The novels and their position in the list are *Anita and Me* (first in the list), *Chapatti or Chips* (second position), *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (fifth position), *Passion and Poppadoms* (seventh position) and *The Pocket Guide To Being An Indian Girl* (tenth position).

While an institution like the British Library has catalogued Nisha Minhas' stories as love stories, this dissertation has attempted to approach the primary bibliography as manuals of conduct that frame the British-Asian females in what is regarded as proper conduct. It is probably because the old manuals of conduct have adopted a new form in self-help books and magazines, that a re-definition of current British literature should be observed. Such a definition started with the inclusion of multiculturalism, as has been maintained above, but within which, the initial hypothesis of this thesis has not been seriously approached, and with this, the analysis of gender relations in a dual context. I indicated that Meera Syal, Nisha Minhas and B. K. Mahal were the only female British Asian female writers with parents that migrated from India I could find in English libraries that approached the issue of arranged marriage with all its implications in a context of duality and culture clash and that made me think about their reactions and attitudes to confront the situation with a number of cultural and social expectations in the Indian way and their British birth and upbringing.

This section cannot conclude without any reference to the relevant role played by the cinema in the access of the public to some novels. Before being known by his novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), Hanif Kureishi was popular for his film scripts

and plays like *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985)² or *Sammie and Rosie get laid* (1988). More recently, *Anita and Me* was taken to the cinema in 2002, *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* was made a TV series in 2005 and not without controversy Monica Ali's novel *Brick Lane* (2004) which led to a series of protests by local Bangladeshi residents in Tower Hamlets, London, in the summer of 2007 who thought the book did not really match their life and beliefs. More recently, the writer and director Shamin Sarif released two films about mixed relationships in 2009, *I can't think straight* and *The world unseen*. Not being adaptations of published novels, both deal with the complexity of the gender relations and social and cultural prejudices in a context of duality as shown in this thesis. The first film features the relationship between an Indian and a Palestinian woman in London. The second film goes back to the 1950's apartheid in South Africa. A young Indian girl breaks the conventional rules of her Indian community in South Africa by running a café in an area for those opposing the harsh rules of the apartheid-led government and falls in love with another woman. These two films attempt, as has already been defended in this paper, to portray other realities of contemporary society.

In the following sections I will try to show the complexity of the different aspects that confront Indian culture in a multicultural society through the analysis of some of its contemporary literature, three female British-Asian female writers, Meera Syal, Nisha Minhas and B. K. Mahal. With this the objective is not to prove anything but to situate the reader in the complexity of a, shall we say, British-Asian context and possibly awake his curiosity for further research on the issue that concerns us here. The analysis of the different topics pointed out in Chapter 2 is as complex and contradictory as the different novels under analysis. Surprising as it may seem, it is difficult, if not impossible, to follow a pure and unbiased line of thinking. In order to achieve my aim, firstly I provide some notes on the authors and characters in their portrayal of identity construction and then concentrate on the factors that shape gender identity taking into account the general data provided in Chapter 2 and some significant quotations from the primary bibliography. Therefore we may conclude with a few key points. First Asian work and Asian issues are prominent in today's British society; second, a role firstly

² It was published with the autobiographical essay 'The Rainbow Sign' in *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *The Rainbow Sign*, Faber, 1986.

dominated by a man has been taken by a woman and her sensitivity and third, the most recent publications still focus on black literature and postcolonialism (Oliva 2001), Alison Donnell 2002, McLeod 2004, Mark Stein c2004, F. English 2006) rather than on the analysis of the new emerging writers probably because of the recent status of their works. Moreover, the readership of female writers, target of this thesis is addressed not only to the British-Asian woman who may be living a situation like the reality of the female protagonists but also to Indian parents, given the difficulty to accept the implications and consequences of the decision to move to a country with different cultural attitudes and beliefs and also to the white community whom they have to live with and share common experiences. Furthermore the writers are also aware of the existence of institutions and groups that support their work, another concern would be the degree of acceptance or refusal of themselves as writers and their novels as a representation of reality within some institutions or literary trends, and that I suggest as a topic for further research.

CHAPTER 4

LIGHTS AND SHADOWS IN NEGOTIATING TRADITION

In the introduction I indicated that the aim of this study was to focus on the female characters created by Meera Syal, Nisha Minhas and B.K. Mahal (For the writers' biographies and the novels summaries see Appendix) from the point of view of both discourse and gender identity in a multicultural society and, as a consequence, culture clash. In order to do so I suggested the hypothetical consideration of the reading of the literature by Meera Syal, Nisha Minhas and B. K. Mahal as manuals of conduct, following Armstrong and Tennenhouse (1987). While Chapter 1 approached some gender issues I deemed more appropriate linked to the concept of conduct books, Chapter 2 gathered some information on some key issues on Indian culture in order to compare them to the primary bibliography and provide a critical reading of the characters. In the third chapter I provided the reader with some of the terminology used to include the literature written by Indian authors and researched on the most recently published books and the existing projects aimed at the spread and knowledge of writers both from the Indian sub-continent and British-Asian authors.

The present chapter allows a critical reading of the pillars of Indian tradition provided in Chapter 2 as applied to the primary bibliography and by reference to it to the British-Asian female characters living in a dual context; a context where the characters are caught in the dunes of identity and the harshness to deal with and reach an agreement between real and expected behaviour, and where most of the Indian precepts seem to be diluting due to the Western influence. These facts reinforce, as we will see, the hypothetical consideration of the reading of the books as conduct manuals which embrace some of the rules imposed on the female protagonists first and the other Indian characters second. These rules, as will be observed, constitute a whole set of limitations on the individual's freedom of action which is characteristic of the old times but that still persist in contemporary society despite its evolution and that make the individual's life depend on the past rather than the future. This fact links to Andrea Levi's article (2000) "This is my England". Thus, her mother's, of Jamaican origin, refusal to talk about her family tree led to Levi's consideration that her mother had come to this country to gain a future, not to dwell on a past. Thus, whereas Levi was educated to be English, the Indian female characters are *educated* to be Indian in England and obliged to grow up to question whether they are English or not.

Most British-Asians are expected to participate and respect the Indian community, and within this, the institution of the family. Theoretically focused on the interests of the individual who is expected to play his social and cultural role regardless of his birthplace and upbringing, this involves not only a control of his actions and a particular relation to the other members but also the awareness of his rights and privileges. Consequently, personal and social identities are intermingled and one cannot be understood without the other.

In the light of this, and separate from the family and the Indian community there exists a group, the Western society in which the characters from our books have been born and brought up, and which represents, in many ways, independence and a departure from the limitation of parents' control. This context highlights the relevance and interest in the different factors that mark the development of the individual in a dual context like the British one and the gender conflict derived from it not only among the members of the Indian communities but also between the Indian and the host groups as introduced in Chapter 2 in more theoretical terms. This gender conflict arises not only from the desired need to maintain tradition and the old beliefs in a contemporary society like the British one on the Indian parents' side but also from the active role played by the female characters, the objects of attention in this thesis, who find themselves trapped in an identity crisis created by social and cultural motives that question their British birth and upbringing and that in most cases move beyond justification.

Throughout history the so called conduct books have played a crucial role in what was believed as appropriate rules of behaviour in the different cultures and as a wished guarantee of the preservation of the dominant ideological standpoint in terms of patriarchy and social status, among others. Needless to say that most of these books were mainly addressed to women, always considered in terms of societies of female subjugation to men and to determine "what a woman should desire to be if she wishes to attract a socially approved male and keep him happy" (Armstrong and Tenenhouse 1987: 5), an emphasis on adequate behaviour that implies a gender and sexual polarity. In this light, it is important to highlight that the Laws of Manu and the *Guru Grand Sahib*, so the religious canon of Hinduism and Sikhism respectively, constitute by themselves a

whole set of regulations about proper behaviour and which as applied to the primary bibliography allow a critical approach and reading on the main female protagonists.

Mainly the books written by Nisha Minhas and the only novel written by B.K.Mahal may be perceived as implicit conduct books that could be considered as bi-directional. On the one hand the reader can identify behaviour in terms of honesty and fidelity understood in Indian terms as honour of the Indian family first and the community second, which are trained. On the other, behaviour as British-born individuals in possession of a double heritage which does not, and should not be interpreted as a violation of the Indian code, either as a Hindu or as a Sikh individual, but as part of the process of development into maturity in a multicultural and dual society and who sometimes handle the situation with irony.

Although Armstrong and Tennenhouse (1987) include as conduct literature pamphlets on marriage, books on manners and morality, and devotional manuals designated for women of the aristocracy, in this dissertation it might be hypothetically represented by literature written by a British-born Asian born female author who has to find a meaning to their existence in a multicultural society. Similarly to Nisha Minhas, B. K. Mahal still reproduces some of the appropriate code of conduct of British Asian women despite their birth in a Western society. While these books cannot be or have not been defined with the terminology included in conduct literature above, a question arises –are not all the quotations from the primary bibliography and their critical analysis rules on who and when to marry, good manners and behaviour? The data provided in the analysis approaches an affirmative answer partly supported by rules that have not only remained through generations but through countries and continents as will be observed.

The Pocket Guide To Being An Indian Girl (2004), which focuses on the life of a second generation Indian teenager, points more in the direction of a conduct book both in style and structure. As a matter of fact what the female protagonist, Sushi, does is create a whole set of rules derived from her own observation and experience and which shows the characteristics and qualities needed to be a good Indian girl as was the case with conduct books, while the ironic perspective is prevalent as the path to criticism. These

rules directly affect her development as a teenager who feels confused and insecure in personal and social terms through the observance of the dual society around her. And it is her use of irony in the title and the plot that helps the protagonist face her own reality of personal and family isolation.

All in all, I suggest a reading of the books in the line of manuals of conduct and I would like to clarify two aspects. Firstly, this study is the result of a personal appreciation after my contact with Armstrong and Tennenhouse's work (1987) and the female writers target of this thesis. Secondly, the intention is not to lump together or attach the same reactions to the complex situation lived in British multicultural society to all the members of the Indian or British Asian communities for two obvious reasons; I am not in the position to do so and although literature is not reality, it is a representation of it and as such it attempts to show the experiences of a section of the population with their worries, concerns and desires so that they become known among the general public. This yields the construction of specific British Asian ethnic identities and the junction of ethnicity with gender and the institution of tradition. Having said this, what follows is an initial review on the conception of Indian women in order to go into the different issues of Indian culture into further detail.

4.1 Training Indian women

In the previous section I suggested reading the books by three British-Asian female writers in the line of conduct books. In this vein, and interpreted as an initial analytical approach to the issue, some of the *advice* Indian parents pass to their offspring as portrayed in the primary bibliography includes such diversity as parents' respect, eating manners, silence, submission or opinion. This advice responds to the need to maintain the views of a hierarchical patriarchal society where women have to act according to a strict and apparently unmovable code of conduct dictated by tradition; a code that the members of the first generation attempt to preserve beyond the homeland not without confrontation in a British multicultural context. It is in this line that I would like the reader to approach this dissertation and that this section was taken as a previous

step to better understand the analysis of the female characters' construction of identity in the present chapter.

Due to the social and cultural submission to her husband, the woman cannot speak or express her opinion freely but be silent as indicated in the following quotation:

Most Indian girls learn to bite their tongues from an early age (...) without knowing it, the Indian way has made them experts in flirting and masters of containing their opinion.

(*S and S* 2003: 353)

As part of this silence women are not allowed any humour as it does not involve respect as expressed in the metaphorical passage:

Indian girls are supposed to keep their sense of humour to themselves in front of men –especially when their elders are present; letting out a small giggle would be frowned upon in the same way as if the Indian girl had just ripped off a huge fart in a busy temple.

(*B and B* 2005: 163)

It is clearly unappealing for an Indian woman to answer their husband back as well as:

[...] for an Indian girl to hold her head high in an Indian man's world takes courage. And Avani, luckily had bags of it.

(*S and S* 2003: 52)

In the same line of thought Indian women are not expected to wear certain clothes or to have sexual relationships before marriage together with a long list of rules indicated in the sections that preceded and that follow this explanation.

The female protagonist's parents *still* instruct their daughters on how to be traditional perfect Indian girls despite the fact that they have been born and brought up in a British context which includes no option for desire, freedom and reason that is outside

the regulated traditional Indian household. This instruction, together with the search for a prospective candidate for marriage, the wedding ceremonies, marriage, the bearing of children and, among others, the insistence on the maintainance of decorum and manners, as will be observed, are part of a conduct code transmitted for centuries:

Indian parents are creatures of habit, a two thousand-year habit; their children's wedding is their crack-cocaine fix and hypocritically they hate rocky marriages.

(*S and S* 2003: 46)

Not only will this unsettle human relationships between members of the same and different cultures and backgrounds but this metaphor of conduct books will also point to the construction of a category of 'woman' between two cultures in the conception of gender as a cultural, historical and ideological construct, and consequently a new femininity.

The power hierarchy dominated by patriarchy is, however, not only applied to women but also to men who are also expected to behave in a particular way in order to satisfy their ancestors:

They chose Zarleena to be his wife knowing full well that he was not ready to marry. So, like a good Indian boy, he went along with the whole shebang. To please his parents. He settled down in a luxury flat in Edgbaston, Birmingham. To please his parents. He said the right thing, did the right thing, turned up at the family dos, invested all his free time in the family business. To please his parents.

(*B and B* 2005:127)

The female characters are also aware of two different stages in their lives, one in which they obeyed their parents without resentment or discussion and one in which everything seemed to be moving against agreement and towards a self-definition marked by rebellion and a desired freedom that in some cases involved a break with lots of Indian ways. Naina, the female protagonist in *Chapatti or Chips* (2000) remembered the

days when she did not question her parents' beliefs and was proud of her roots, her family, her skin, her smell. She had to forget Dave as far as:

[h]er parents had not come all this distance to have their family diluted down by the English way.

(*Ch or Ch* 2000: 31)

However her feelings and the need to be her own self will win the battle against parents and tradition.

Last but not least, the literature under analysis also highlights the role played by cooking as a previous step to marriage. What may seem insignificant in the beginning develops in one of the most important aspects in the attempt to preserve the dominant Indian ideology. In Indian culture the kitchen is regarded as the holiest place in the house, the place in which the sacrifice of the food is accomplished and in a society where caste, region and social position determines what to eat and what not to eat, it adopts a greater significance. While Meera Syal's first novel accentuates the symbolic value of cooking and maintains it as the first task to be accomplished by the mother after work and as a preliminary for one of the conditions for marriage:

This food was not just something to fill a hole, it was soul food, it was the food their far -away mothers made and came seasoned with memory and longing, this was the nearest they would get for many years, to home. So far, I had resisted all my mother's attempts to teach me the rudiments of Indian cuisine.

(*AM* 1996: 61)

Thus the twofold significance of the kitchen is understood in terms of gender roles, and with this, the inseparable union between the woman and the household chores, and the attachment to the land in the preservation of the old ways. Conversely, in her second novel, the main character, Tania, is not taught in the expected areas, cooking, shopping, and cleaning but in the knowledge of the person before you in the sphere of interpersonal

relations without forgetting the old manners and the awareness of the completion of a codified behaviour regarding movement and talk, not without irony:

[w]hat she [her 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 their edges and hollows, silver and silent as mercury. How to walk in small steps, talk in sweet tones, pour dainty cupful, refill plates in the shake of a *dupatta*, smile and smile at visitors, and, most importantly, save any rages and rumbles for the privacy of my dark bedroom.

(LHH 1999: 145)

Actions that acquire a greater significance with a dupatta on, a long scarf that is essential to many South Asian women's suits. It is traditionally worn across both shoulders. However, the dupatta can also be worn like a cape around the entire torso. Although it has long been a symbol of modesty in South Asian dress, it is often treated as an accessory in current urban fashion. Nevertheless, it remains an integral part of the Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani clothing.

The mental ability to play with one of the principles of Indian culture in order to lower the effect and the tension between mother and daughter and accomplish the expected aims is shown in:

I tried to flatter her into doing the rest of the cooking by informing her that true mastery of Indian cooking lay within the kitchen, which was of course ruled by the female head of the household. And that wasn't to say that women were confined to the home any more, it was just to say that women knew cooking better.

(TPG 2004: 86)

Given the impossibility of learning how to cook, one of the most important chores to be learnt by an Indian girl, Sushi's flattery of her mother's skills involves the evasion of the responsibility of cooking and, as a consequence, the evasion of traditional roles,

modifying, thus, strict norms on female sexuality. In fact the significance of Sushi's words moves beyond the simple fact of cooking and focuses on the redefinition of the workings of the Indian patriarchal system in a new discourse on gender roles.

4.2 The formation of identity in a context of duality

In this chapter I will trace the interest in different factors that shape the British-Asian female characters from identity, friendship, racism and religion, through sexuality, marriage, cultures mixing and the breaking of socially and culturally established stereotypes. Before doing so two questions need be born in mind. Firstly, in the introduction I highlighted that although the aim of this thesis is not to analyse Manju Kapur's work deeply I cannot ignore her importance in her portrayal of the Indian females' struggle to gain their own ground in terms of their freedom and the rights denied by patriarchy and as the spectrum of change in the literature being produced in India over the last years. This struggle is framed by the historical, political and cultural situation in India, which although it is not the same as in England, for obvious reasons, it is moving in a similar direction in the social sphere and technology. Having been born and brought up in India her female characters resemble most of the British-female characters created by Meera Syal, Nisha Minhas and B.K. Mahal in the characters' rebellious spirit as concerns the woman's place in society and the wish to create a space of their own. Also moved and constrained by tradition and cultural expectations, terms continuously repeated or implied in this thesis, the circumstances will not free them from the dichotomy of the social demands and personal satisfaction.

Secondly, the hypothesis raised requires of morality, a concept linked to the different forms of conduct, and consequently, not free from further controversy and debate. Foucault (1992 II: 25) testifies that the approach to morality is twofold. On the one hand, it means "a set of values and rules of action that are recommended to individuals through the intermediary of various prescriptive agencies such as the family, educational institutions, churches, and so forth". But it also refers to "the real behaviour of individuals in relation to the rules and values that are recommended to them" (ibid

25). The next passage serves to illustrate the two sides of Foucault's argument. Thus, Jennica, a rather traditional Indian woman living in India and who was fascinated by stories about England for their idiosyncrasies, is hesitant about letting Cory, an English, and above it, a white man, stay over during his visit to India. This hesitation between recommended action and the real behaviour of the individual distinguished by the French philosopher moves in the direction of the second, that is, what the individual considers right given, as is the case in the novel, a long friendship and previous help on his side to the detriment of traditional appropriate behaviour. Before Cory's arrival to New Delhi, Jennica's inner thoughts are:

What would people think? An unmarried Indian woman lets an unmarried white man stay over. Yet, despite the risk of the gossip, she loved cooking for Cory and she loved pampering him. Most of all, she loved to listen to his stories of England. England sounded so grand. So free. So understanding. Although some things he'd told her seemed a little 'odd'.

(TDH 2007: 33)

A passage in which England could be established as the object of desire in her imagination, an object she could not handle due to the bewildering feelings provoked in her.

It seems, however, that whatever the theoretical viewpoint adopted, the key element turns out to be the transmission of the message to [not *by*] the older generations; the possibility of accepting one's origin and culture without the strict norms of behaviour. The new times bring a new transmission which combines tradition with the inner development of the individual. It cannot be forgotten that our female protagonists may be Indian in colour but English in morals, opinion and education. They know no different so adaptation to Western culture does not really apply contrary to the first generation immigrants. The female characters' need to conform to the outside world is not the result of a necessary dialogue but of their condition as citizens born and brought up in the UK and who have a background that has not been learned but acquired. Any attempt to be themselves and lead a life in accordance with the Western patterns of

behaviour is not only criticized but also punished. It is then, in Hall's words (Hall 1987: 275) when "the loss of a `stable sense of self' is sometimes called `the dislocation or de-centring of the subject'.

As Hanif Kureishi (Lee 1995, Kaleta 1998, Nasta 2002 (2002), a key representative of contemporary British literature, reflects in his book, *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) :

My name is Karim Amir, and I'm an Englishman born and bred, almost. I am often considered to me a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two histories. But I don't care -Englishman I am (though not proud of it) from the south London suburbs and going somewhere. Perhaps it is the odd mixture of continents and blood, of here and there, of belonging and not, that makes me restless and easily bored.

(*The Buddha of Suburbia* 1990: 3)

Thus, contrary to what would be expected, an Indian name, Karim Amir, belongs to an Englishman as a result of the two cultures and histories. It is in this passage that Kureishi explains the complexity of the mixture of *two continents and blood, of here and there, of belonging and not*. However, he does not consider himself as *caught between two cultures*. The social anthropologist Ballard refers to the coexistence of the two cultures and the experience of the second generation in Britain as skilled cultural navigators (Ballard 1994: 31). The only option available seems to be that of integration and adaptability. This, together with the other quotations, will show that identity has changed from being unconscious to conscious.

The daily problems and worries suffered by the first generation immigrants, as Zarlena's father explains to his children so that they know about their parents's crude reality on the arrival to England from India:

[...] like feeding the family, holding down a job, paying the mortgage and keeping healthy were compounded by that old chestnut called 'belonging'.

(*B and B* 435)

It stood as a battle that was never mentioned in books, a battle that is regarded in metaphorical terms as:

[l]ike a warrior returning from a bloody battlefield doesn't boast of the enemies he's slain, he just wants to get back to his family and live in peace.

(*B and B* 2005: 435)

As has been pointed out in Chapter 2, identity falls into categories like age, marital status or parenthood, categories which determine the characters' relationship problems.

A key point in all the novels under analysis is that the Asian community not only has to justify their identity and contend with the example set by their fathers, but they also have to reassess their cultural values. This matter accentuates the definition of identity in terms of cultural foundations and not of natural wishes that testify the power and weight of tradition. Therefore, and as Akkash states in Meera Syal's novel:

We are the generation that can change things, redefine what being Asian and male or Asian and female means, without losing pride in who we are. Because culture evolves and changes, just like human beings.

(*LHH* 1999:103)

Thus, this new definition of Asianness is not considered from the point of view of a unique culture, the Asian one as anchored to the Asian subcontinent and with a single focused background, but from the dual perspective of the Asian and European continents. This re-definition does not imply either the denial or refusal of one's own origins but the presentation of an identity inserted in an always evolving political, cultural and social context.

The approach to identity is inevitably linked to power and ideology as maintained in Chapter 1. Consequently, in most cases, it is used as a strategic weapon (see sections

2.2.6.2, 4.2.4.1) in order to be accepted by a majority culture, the British in our case. Under certain circumstances once such acceptance is achieved, the immediate reaction is denial in a way that artistry and social reform are polarized. Thus, in Tania's case, a British-Asian girl who begins her professional career filming the lives of some members of the Asian community in London becomes mainstream and at the expense of true friendship is aware of the richness and the advantages of the exploitation of her Asian roots in financial terms. As it is universally acknowledged, some racism is generated by a low position in the social ladder. However, in a society with a taste for difference and the exotic, these bring the achievement of wealth and ethnic recognition. Nevertheless, Tania's success is accomplished at the expense of betraying her friends through her representation of the Indian community's problems. Thus each character reacts to the conflicting demands of being a British-Asian female in different ways. As a consequence of what has been stated so far it is worth remarking that identity is not as transparent and unproblematic as we think. No matter what attempts are made to leave their past behind and look forwards, that shade will always haunt them. In both stories, this conflict between the two cultures is always present.

As can be seen in the novels, identity becomes a crucial term in a context in which it is threatened and put into question, or in Ralph J. Crane consideration "when we perceive difference" (2000: 2), in our case the the polarity between the British and the citizens from the Indian subcontinent. In the clash of cultures while the process of insertion in a new one becomes a threat; immersion into the Western culture seems to be more apparent although it is a long and gradual process. It is then when concepts such as delusion, confusion, false stereotypes and even fighting become key items. In the quotation below identity is linked to the couple:

Before she [Kareena] had time to protest, he [Samir] explained the importance of how a couple should also be an individual. How rules were not made to be followed but were meant to be made up as you went along. Being Indian didn't presume Indianness.

(*S and S* 2003: 224)

Some crucial conclusions can be drawn from this passage. The female's desire for the couple to move in the same direction does not necessarily imply the passing through the path of traditional rules, which are fixed and unmovable, but the elaboration of new rules that result from the individuals' experiences and development. A direct consequence of this leads, firstly, to an existence anchored in the present and not in the past; secondly, to the refusal of canons dictated by tradition; and, thirdly, the adoption of a reflexive and critical spirit. Thus, the code of behaviour is not defined in the same terms as it is by the older generations but from a new angle and identity is not the origin of a specific cultural conduct.

In chapter 2, and contrary to Stuart Hall's indication (1987: 44) that "Thinking about my own sense of identity, I realize that it has always depended on the fact of being a migrant, and being different from the rest of you":

Weren't Zaleena and Honey just as British as anyone born on these shores?

Weren't they shocked and ruled by this country?

(*B and B* 20: 155)

It stands as a clear example of Ralph J. Crane's consideration (2000: 3) that "identity is constructed via difference rather than sameness"; no matter the degree of adaptation of the *New Community*. The characters are not only born in a Western society but they also share and *represent* a set of common experiences which define British society and British citizens. Thus they link everyday life with a national reality that outlines them all. This feeling of loneliness and disconnection is reinforced by the feelings felt by a bride on her wedding day, the moment her life is expected to change for the better even though contradicted by real facts:

Zarleena couldn't remember having been to an Indian wedding where the bride looked anything but petrified. Lost. Sad. Alone. And in some ways broken. The only thing smiling was the sari. She herself, as she walked around the sacred fire on her wedding day, felt the emotions crawling out of her skin like soldiers in camouflage. Bang! Her family was shot away. Bang! Her friends and acquaintances were no more. Bang! Her home gone. Bang!

Her street gone. Bang! Bang! Bang! Her job, her old haunts, her virginity gone, all gone. And then the biggest gunshot of all when she realized—BANG! Her life was gone. Come morning, after the blooded sheets are taken away (and probably displayed to the groom's mother to prove the purity of her own daughter in law), many an Indian girl reaches the same simple conclusion. She is now the slave of a new family and, unless she is really lucky, she will never again be allowed to speak her mind.

(B and B 2005: 274-275)

In the quotation above the use of metaphors, a part of the language of daily life, compares the wedding and the bride's mental state with the battlefield and the feeling of every soldier after every bomb that drops. As shown above, the Indian woman becomes the victim of manipulative behaviour due to the demands of tradition and the receiver of a message to submit that does not match her aspirations as an individual with her own voice and needs. Being fully aware of the existence of two clearly defined periods of life marked by marriage, she knows it is a process that, like many other Indian women, she has to go through and that is distant from her choices, a period in which her family, friends, job and virginity come to play a secondary role while her new family comes to the fore, and with this, a code of behaviour aimed at silence, suppression of her voice and a regulated sexuality that reinforces the submission to the husband, to the detriment of trust, freedom of action and expression, and a sexism that polarizes gender relationships and that denies the women a life of their own. All these characteristics would respond to the model of the desirable woman, or even more, the good Indian wife, as regards Indian culture, whose silence will guarantee the continuation of the correct Indian way, contrary to the role played by the other British-Asian female characters in the primary bibliography that, as we will see, points more towards a negotiation of tradition.

Having reached this point it is worth saying that identity is linked to rites related to a traditionally accepted and ruled sexuality and at the disposal of an identity that needs to be imposed in some cases and reinforced in others. In this case, we cannot forget Lokuge Chandari's consideration of self-identity (Crane 2000: 17). He defines self-identity "not only as one's sense of self but as constituted within the gaze of the other"

as discussed in Chapter 2. In the quotations given there seems to be no place for people who are Indian in colour but British in opinions, in morals and in intellect as has been highlighted above. One instance is enough to show the truth of this. After visiting India to meet her natural mother and know where she actually came from, Saffron, an Indian girl adopted by English parents, reaches the conclusion that:

[s]he didn't belong on the dry soil of India. She was British with a British mother and father and a British brother. Her real family was back in England. They were the ones who had brought her up. Her white mother was the one who told her about periods. Her white father was there for her when she was dumped by her first boyfriend. Her white family was there celebrating with her when she passed her driving test. For sure India might have given birth to her, but it was Britain who raised her.

(TDH 2007: 508)

This passage links the issue of identity to the other books by Nisha Minhas but from a different point of view. Being born from Indian parents, her adoption by English parents involved a birth and education based on British principles and with no bond with the Asian continent to the envy of her Indian friends and the impossibility of discussing issues like arranged marriage or going to the temple as according to them she had thrown away her real identity:

What the hell did Saffron know about what it was like being an Indian girl brought up in an Indian household? What did Saffron know about boredom, about slavery, about strictness, about being the perfect Indian daughter? About family loyalty and family pressures? Saffron was brought in a white family with slippery morals, sex before marriage, and cups of steaming tea. She was as far away from an Indian upbringing as Mowgli was when he grew up with the wolves. Yet, this un-Indian life, this free-for-all way of living, was what some Indian girls secretly craved.

(TDH 2007: 250)

The passage above highlights the polarization of the Indian and English cultures and the impossibility of cultures mixing due to a set of values and morals which seem to

have been frozen and do not allow the passage from one group to another. Thus, the *apparent* perfection of the Indian way is counterbalanced by the *imperfections* of the English. Paradoxically, these extremes also hide the resignation of some Indian girls to the acceptance of tradition; or at least, the external acceptance of it and the strange combination of admiration and envy towards a life of freedom beyond slavery and strict conformity. This passage calls for a new discourse on femininity and for new ideals that would find a response in either the refusal of or the negotiation with tradition. However, while from the Indian perspective the girls who run against the established system would be considered as traitors, from the English perspective they are only asking for their rights as individuals in need for a life, a life characterised by their own choices as regards daily issues like love, their future husband or behaviour, that is, “they wanted something that most people take for granted, they wanted a life. It was all about freedom or rather, the lack of it” (TDH 2007: 250), facts which cause her Indian friends’ envy and bring together Jez and Saffron’s common condition:

That something was called ‘being different’. Saffron was the only Asian girl in college who had white parents. And Jez was the only ‘official’ gay.

(TDH 2007: 97)

This opposes Layla, a member of the so called group of three Asian girls, together with Rani and Monica, mixture of resignation and identity impotence. Being traditional women with a traditional Indian upbringing, they consider Saffron a traitor to her culture having been born from Indian parents who abandoned her and was adopted by English parents. It is Saffron’s lack of knowledge on Indian culture and her difficulty to understand it that creates controversial gender relations with the Indian girls. In fact, the polarization of their lives makes them regard her as non-Asian and show a cruelty expressed in the use of Punjabi, a language Saffron did not speak or understand, to shout at her words like fake, coconut, and fraud when they went past her. Therefore, the relationship with her does not become less difficult, as Layla said:

Jez trying to teach you how to be white?(...) ‘And I’m trying to teach you how to be *Indian*’.

(TDH 2007: 249)

This is the reason of Layla and her friends' (Rani and Monica) hatred:

We hate you because you are so ignorant of the Indian way. You let your blood be diluted down by white ideals and then you happily walk around with your Indian skin. You can't be both, Saffron; you can't take the best of both worlds. Look at the way you openly kiss boys and flirt with them. That's not being Indian. That's why we hate you. You flaunt your freedoms in our face. That's why you'll never get respect'.

(TDH 2007: 249)

It is after comments like the quotations above that Saffron wonders about her sense of guilt; was it her fault that her Indian parents left her in an orphanage, that she was adopted by English parents, and even more important of all, what was she to do with her mixed-up life?.

This discourse on what being Indian means is clearly opposed to Tanis's idea (LHH 1999) of the metaphorical combination of a leather jacket and a bindi, that is, of the Indian and the British culture. If this idea of being Indian does not match the right conduct after kissing a white man as indicated in the quotation above, the general and stereotyped use of the term Asian to classify the members of, or the descendants from the Indian communities does nothing more than add one more grain to the identity and gender problems.

4.2.1 *Don't call me Asian*

In the midst of this identity controversy, this section –named after a radio programme broadcast on Radio 4 on January 11th 2005 in which Sarfraz Manzoor¹ investigated why many Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims are turning away from the term

¹ He is a writer and broadcaster. His TV directing credits include *The Great British Asian invasion* for Channel 4 and he is a regular guest on BBC's *Newsnight Review*. He published his first book, *Greetings from Bury Park*, in June 2007. (See www.guardian.co.uk/profile/SarfrazManzoor)

‘British Asian’ to define themselves– stems from the researchers’ curiosity on the wide array of terms used to name the characters’ origin in the primary bibliography.

Examining the impact of September 11th 2001 on the different Asian communities in Britain, Manzoor interviewed young people about why they define themselves as British Muslim or British Hindu and found that many are divided about this. According to the report, *Connecting British Hindus*, carried out by the Runnymede Trust and the Hindu Forum, Hindus living in Britain do not want to be described as ‘Asian’, according to a big study of the community. Instead, they want to be known as British Indian, Hindu or even *Desi*, a Hindi word growing in popularity with the young that means being rooted in one’s home country. It is used in media technology and to describe people and culture with its roots in the Indian subcontinent.

This complexity and the difficulty of establishing a homogeneous line of thought in the topics presented in this thesis are also reflected in the terminology used to name the members of the second generation. On the one hand, the term ‘Asian’ is considered something of the past; a term created by administrators at the time of the British Empire that does not conform to contemporary society and whose broad significance lumps together all the people from the subcontinent that does not allow any identity specification. Its first appearance in the primary bibliography is catalogued in Meera Syal’s *Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (1999), a book published in the 90’s, a time when it acquired a new cultural meaning. As she illustrates in her novel, the wrong social conceptions concerning identity were reflected in literature:

The Yanks would love you! ‘Mark enthused. ‘You look Mexican. Tell them you’re Asian and they’ll expect some bird from Vietnam, say you’re Indian and they’ll ask what reservation. When they twig you’re from the land of Ravi Shankar and holy men, they’ll be creaming their Calvin Kleins.’

‘Is that a good thing? Tania asked. ‘I thought they liked easy to read packaging. You know, WASP, Jap, redneck, Latino...’

‘They like whatever someone tells them the next big thing is going to be. Why shouldn’t it be you?’

(LHH 1999: 255)

The change from the term Asian to Indian delimits the latter to specific cultural, social, political and historical events that distances it from the peculiarities of other Asian countries. The novels that concern us here represent “renegotiations of identity” (Schoene-Harwood 1999: 54) to which a clearly defined identity is needed in what the same author addresses as a “context of transcultural modernity” (*ibid* 54). While I agree on the writer’s urge for a redefinition of the discourse of identity, this view of transculturality should not go unchallenged in the analysis of the primary bibliography. Therefore, the female protagonists are challenging their ancestors’ traditions and culture in defending their British upbringing, and intending not to move between two cultural arenas but supporting a unique British identity containing the two implicitly through a background discourse of transculturality. This challenge and the desire to reach a consensus in their negotiation of tradition defends the display of their own behaviour in terms of naturalness and not a petrified artefact about the way Indian women should act and that would apparently permit most of the attitudes and conduct criticised in the stereotypes attached to the white community and that are gathered in 4.2.2.2.

In this new discourse, which has traditionally been highly dependent on “ethnically shaped identities” (*ibid* 55), the characters’ position as British citizens requires an identity that is not so explicitly and consciously linked to ethnicity but to their position as individuals with a desire for freedom and choices in life that correspond to them as human beings. The difficulty in the achievement of this aim springs not only from the characteristics of a modern world but also from the complexities of a transcultural, multicultural sphere.

In the midst of these paradoxes, the term British-Asian is rejected by most teenagers mainly because of its association with the Bradford Riots,² according to the interviews under the title naming this section. Nevertheless, as can be observed in the books written by Nisha Minhas, a few contradictory results can be found in the use of words like ‘English-born Asian’ (*Ch or Ch* 2000), ‘British-born Asian’ (*P and P* 2004), ‘British-Asian woman’ and ‘British-born Indian woman’, the latter opposed to Indian

² They began July 7, 2001 in Bradford, West Yorkshire, England. It occurred as a result of heightened tension between ethnic minority communities and the city’s white majority, stoked by confrontation between the Anti-Nazi League and far right groups, such as the National Front. Similar race riots had occurred a few days earlier in other parts of Northern England.

women from India (*B and B* 2005) on the one hand, and 'Indian men' (*Ch or Ch* 2000), 'Older Indian sisters' and 'Indian mothers' (*S and S* 2003), 'Indian girls' (*P and P* 2004, *B and B* 2005), 'Indian woman' (*The MM* 2006) on the other. The opposition Indian/Asian girl/woman can also be seen in the same book. A look at the items pointed out in the different books shows that the later the publication the greater the tendency to use the term 'British' attached to some connotation to the subcontinent. This complexity is caused by different countries of birth. In fact, and contrary to what is happening lately in British society, no dual combination is seen as could be the case of 'British-Hindu' or 'British Sikh'. Any reference to religion is made on behalf of it without consideration as to birth. Samir calls himself a 'Sikh' in *Saris and Sins* (2003: 415, 416) and Marina a 'Hindu' in *Passion and Poppadoms* (2004: 388, 396). As far as my research is concerned, no literature has been published on this issue except for the report indicated above and Nesbit (1998). Nevertheless, a few conclusions can be drawn from this initial study. First of all, and as has been pointed out above, the complexity which characterizes the context of a dual culture, with its acceptance and refusal of old and new values and, as a consequence, the difficulty of combining both and the gender conflict caused by the freedom of the British culture and the restrictions of Indian tradition is shown in the unstable and problematic nature of the identity terminology. Second, as is shown in the passages from the books, whenever India is set as an example to be followed, the speaker addresses the listener with the term 'Indian' (*Ch or Ch* (2000): 55, 85, 195, 225, 239, 287; *S and S* (2003): 51, 83, 224; *P and P* (2004): 71, 137, 148, 245, 245, 378; *B and B* (2005): 142, 163, 240, 271, 288, 329, 375; *The MM* (2006): 428) while, when the Western values are opposed to the Eastern ones, the term 'British-Asian' is introduced. The term British appears more often in most of the identity identifications in *The Marriage Market* (2006), in contrast to the previous novels. A possible explanation for this is that teenagers feel more identified with Britain and, although they are conscious of their Hindu/Sikh/Indian background they are also conscious of the advantages of combining both heritages. However, this identity needs modification and re-definition, as they do not regard this background on the same terms or as strictly as the older generations. Despite the fact that this statement is applicable to most of the characters from the books under analysis, either male or female, I am not in the position to affirm that other possibilities are not plausible.

In the midst of this complexity, which does not admit of any easy solution, I now wish to focus our attention on the different factors that shape one's own self, which is not separated from the dichotomies of identity terminology observed above and which will influence gender relations. Firstly, the focus of interest will be on identity; and, secondly, on issues related to the latter and that are linked to Foucault's concept of morality analysed above, –that is, the twofold perspective of the term as both the values and rules dictated by tradition– in the Indian case, and the way the individuals act in relation to such values and norms. As will be seen, there is not a unified line of action, though it is also true that most of the female protagonists resist rather than obey the old values.

In order to better understand the analytical section I would like to draw the reader's attention to three basic concepts that will be directly or indirectly implied in the different sections. Thus, in her study of young British Hindus' perceptions on their religious tradition, Nesbit (1998: 190) explores their understandings of themselves as British, Asian and Hindu. She examined British-South Asian identities along the three axes of Britishness, Asianness and their religion. Now in our female writers the axes could be reinterpreted in terms of Britishness, the individual's freedom and birth culture, with a feasible redefinition of the latter in terms of duality and hybridity –as maintained in this thesis- and beyond the enclosed Indian context.

4.2.2 Psychological identity

4.2.2.1 Role of the parents, brother and husband

The reader might find the question that gave the name to section 2.1.3.1 bewildering, if not surprising in a dissertation on British-Asian female characters. In fact the same question could be applied to any culture, as the relationship between parents and children has been problematic throughout time. However, the parents' role is not clear as the line between their own needs and their descendants' is not clearly drawn; they are not really aware of their children's needs and this fact leads to confrontation.

The individual is expected to control his/her conduct in order to protect his/her and his/her family honour. Thus he/she subconsciously recognises the existence of a power hierarchy that hides a politically correct message and that involves the acceptance and respect of those above him or her. Furthermore he/she is fully aware that the resistance to them will end in failure and disownment. The female characters, as will be analysed further below, do not entirely reject traditional and culture restrictions *per se* but call for a new message that incorporates the demands of the contemporary world in a constant process of social, political and technological advance. We cannot forget that the Indian parents stand, if the reader allows me to say so, as the official representatives and preservers of the Indian culture in England. Opposed to the family, there is a member of the host culture who attempts to counterbalance, modify, and even threaten the Indian parents' discourse on the Indian issues indicated in Chapter 2.

Nevertheless the discourse on Indian parents accentuates an evolution from the early novels and accomplishes a different function. Thus while Meera Syal highlights the parents' memories of partition in her first novel *Anita and Me* (1996), the division by the English of Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan and the social and political problems derived from it such as mobility, lack of knowledge of what was really happening until it happened, the need to reconstruct their lives and their early experiences of their arrival in Britain, the later novels concentrate on the difficulty of British-Asian born teenagers to cope with their family's roots. Thus, as to the former novels, Anita only knew about her parents' history inadvertently. In spite of her desire to ask about it,

I was afraid to ask. I realised that the past was not a mere sentimental journey for my parents, like the song told its English listeners. It was a murky bottomless pool full of monsters and the odd shining coin, with a deceptively still surface and a deadly undercurrent. And me, how could I jump in before I had learned to swim?

(AM 1996: 75)

As to the later novels, and as a mode of example, Naina was conscious of the transmission of a set of rules and limitations hard to fight against. As she maintains,

Naina viewed history for a second: a great, sprawling family tree; generation after generation had been married this way– the arranged marriage way. And it worked, she saw that it worked; her whole family was proof of that. Begot, begot, begot, and here she was sitting on top of that tree, overlooking the deep roots of her own family, with doubts.

(*Ch or Ch* 2000: 165)

In Britain, more British-Asian teenagers are making choices that do not conform to their parents' cultural and social expectations and they live more in accordance with their peers. Not only do they refuse to identify with them, as Marina says,

Who wants to understand parents? What sort of geeky kid stands up on the school playing field and says, 'I want to grow up like my parents? Who would understand that???'

(*P and P*: 2004: 162)

but they also feel the need and be satisfied that they can prove that they can live a life of their own. In Marina's case, her wish to move to Oxford stands as a symbolic representation of the fact that she can live her life and survive by her own means. This new discourse on female independence does not entail disrespect towards the parents but the opening of a new path through which to find the meaning of life resulting in happiness and self-satisfaction. Nevertheless, these aspirations are not understood by their parents. As Marina states,

I want to prove to you both that I can make it without your help. No disrespect. But I would love to come back one day and say, "Mum, Dad, put down your *dhal*, open the champagne, your only daughter has made you proud. I am a huge success.

(*P and P* 2004: 163)

Despite not being so deeply rooted in the chains of tradition, like other Indian girls, Marina is also caught in an identity crisis characteristic of a dual context. The preservation of the Indian tradition in the United Kingdom, leads not only to the

generational and cultural gap between the first (parents) and the second generations (British born) but also to the formation of a new identity that tumbles its blocks. Therefore the constant fight and defence of their British upbringing by the younger generations and the knowledge of the surrounding personal and cultural failures by the members of the first generation, a measured degree of freedom is allowed. Thus, Marina's parents let her make her own decisions although it also included the wrong decisions:

'Follow your heart, Marina', her parents insisted. 'The secret of a happy life is an honest life, and there is no honesty in following the hearts of others'. But Marina had two hearts to follow. Her Western heart and her Eastern heart. Like two drumsticks thumping on a drum. Two different beats to a rhythm of life. Her parents had just left her to it. Removed her Indian stabilizers and told her to freewheel down the English hill. But the hill was steep sometimes, and there were days when her brakes failed.

(P and P 2004: 84)

This discourse on the difficulty of a dual culture and the inner psychological dichotomy does not arrive at an easy solution. Consequently, and as Marina says, the double British-Asian identity stems from the difficulty to choose one way or the other and the need to move between the best of the two. The implications of this dichotomy results, similarly, to the other female characters to the violation of the expected conduct, a new discourse on marriage, based in real love, the attempt to change the oldest generations' attitudes. As regards the former, Marina expresses it through a metaphor that clearly frames the strictness of tradition and its constricting character. Thus, despite Marina's parents' love marriage defying the Indian caste system and regardless of what their community thought, the elders' attitudes were not easily changeable. As Marina says,

And by now one might think that the elders would submit to change, but like a tree grows rings, an Indian grows more stubborn. The older relatives, the hardy oak trees of India, being the hardest to please. Out with the chainsaw. Down with the trunks.

(P and P 2004: 187)

In this way, the role of the parents, as well as the other characters, the brothers and husbands, is well defined; to educate the daughters to preserve the institution of the family and marriage;

His mother [Samir's] had been adamant that his wife should be good with children and know how to instil discipline. His father had been of the strong opinion that his wife should not be from Liverpool as the accent grated on him.

(*S and S* 2003: 116)

Not only will the real role of the husband (see Samir in *Bindis and Brides*) but also the need for a love marriage, with more cases of mixed race relationships, (see Marina in *Passion and Poppadoms*, Jeena in *The Marriage Market*), the desire to be themselves without any limitation and the need for a new conception of tradition, will modify the role of the parents and the expectations on their children. However, before approaching these issues in greater detail it is necessary to refer to cases in which the female characters feel the weight of responsibility towards their parents, an issue which is discussed with members of the white community, Dave in *Chapatti or Chips*, Thomas in *Passion and Poppadoms* and Aaron in *The Marriage Market* because of the impossibility of justifying the unjustifiable. As a mode of example, Saffron Harris, the female protagonist in *Tall, Dark and Handsome* (2007) adopted by English parents, wonders about her origins and goes in search of her roots. This drives her into an inner battle that, unlike the female characters from Nisha Minhas' previous novels, awakens the need to look for their roots in India so as to understand and come to terms with her own identity and feel her own self is complete. Being sure of the fact that in order to know who you are you need to know where your origin is, she begins a process of self - knowledge which is not empty of doubts. As a result of this need, not only does she question her adopted parents' responsibility for her lack of knowledge about her birthplace, India, but she also looks for answers to questions that they cannot answer. Not worrying about her daughter's past but about her present and future, but their daughter makes them feel responsible for not having taught her about India, about her natural mother and her religion, a responsibility she considered belonged to them and

which accentuates the problematic relationship with Cory, an English man who knew more about India than herself:

Wasn't it your duty to encourage me to read and learn about India? Shouldn't you have taken me to a temple so I could see inside? Or instead of our annual holiday in Canada, shouldn't we, maybe, have gone to India, just the once, to at least see together the land of my birth? Or maybe none of this was ever your responsibility, maybe you did your bit the moment you gave me a new home with a new family. The truth is this: I don't know what to think. I don't know what to feel. I just know that I don't know who I am any more. I feel lost.

(TDH 2007:131)

Thus, she has challenged her need to know her origins and the feeling of being unfair to her parents with her questions and the feeling that

[m]aybe searching for the keys to her past was a mistake. Maybe it was best that those doors were left closed.

(TDH 2007: 177)

This inner battle with herself regardless of the opportunity to be herself offered by her parents is about to develop into a tormented relationship, a fact that germinates a world of lights and shadows as no book can tell the individual about the most natural facts in life and the entangled world of human relations. As she states,

It's not as if there was a guide book called *When White Adopts Brown*. It's not as if there was a real precedent for this sort of thing –in fact, white families adopting Indian children was surely a recent development, nearly unheard of twenty-five years before (when Saffron was adopted).

(TDH 2007: 162)

In the end, this problem also implies the step towards inner freedom after an explanation from her parents and her realization that her destiny was to be an Essex girl and break all her ties with India. However, and as her adopting mother states,

For starters you have the colour of your skin, your Indian features, your Indian soul. There is no denying that you look Indian. And, in some ways, you also have your name.

(TDH 2007: 177)

The imbalance between the awareness and acceptance of her roots reaches its climax with the meeting of her natural mother, after finding the meaning of the tattoo on her arm given to her when she was a little girl. Nevertheless, this meeting is not free from doubts and insecurity after a trip to India to meet her natural mother. For sure she could hang around for a few days and meet her brothers and sister, but the truth of the matter was she did not belong to India so the process of self discovery is unfulfilled.

Having said this, as far as the fathers are concerned, in section 2.1.3.1.2 I mentioned the concept of the woman as a selling product, that is, as an element of cultural exchange following Lévi-Strauss' "biological and social point of view: women as an element of exchange to preserve the conventions of one's own culture", of which we find a precedent in Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (going back in time to the French Revolution). The author referred to the treatment given to daughters as "objects in the marketplace among fathers and husbands without any concern for the desires of the individual" (Armstrong and Tennenhouse 1987: 12). Thus, in *Chapatti or Chips* (2000), Naina's, another candidate for an arranged marriage, father

[...] was basically a salesman selling his product—his daughter. The only difference being that she did not come with a five-year warranty or a thirty-day no fuss-return. And as salesmen are known to exaggerate, so too did Naina's dad.

(*Ch or Ch* 2000: 28)

This same interpretation can be found much later in the book when Dave addresses Kiran about Naina, "But it sounds to me like you're selling me a car" (*Ch or Ch* 2000: 226). Conversely, *Passion and Poppadoms* (2004), portrays the other side of the coin; the case in which a young British-Asian girl does not wish to lay her worries on her parents in metaphorical economic terms. It was important that Marina's mum and dad

[...] did not become overly concerned with Marina's direction in life. Her parents' house was not a car boot sale where she sold off her worries cheap.

(*P and P* 2004: 164)

Therefore, her worries are not an element of exchange but she was adult and independent with all the consequences, "It was important that she left Watford knowing that her parents were proud of her" (*P and P* 2004: 164). Despite the freedom of decision given to their daughter and despite the fact that they had defied the caste system through a love marriage, her parents still become the thorn in Marina's side. In fact, the situation of their daughter as a spinster in the Indian community despite her late age lead to their insistence on her marriage and the suggestion of offering her help to find a prospective candidate. Nevertheless, and contrary to Marina's adopted uncle's intent to take her to India to instil discipline, the efforts to get her accept a Hindu man prove futile and her parents become resigned to the fact that she will have a mixed relationship with a white man. Thus, Marina's parents are really perpetrators of a tradition code they had challenged in their youth and the victims of social and cultural prejudices that emphasise their daughter's sexual life with a white partner and her career to the detriment of more important qualities such as morals, the effect on her personality or sense of reason. This is only from the point of view of the Indian community only and not necessarily detrimental in the wider scheme of things or the rest of British society.

This materialistic and cold approach to marriage is close to the conception of the meetings with prospective candidates as "a sort of rite of passage" (*LHH* 1: 150). Tania thought she had to go through "like buying your first bra"; a metaphor representing the triviality of sexuality (*LHH* 1999: 150).

This conception of the woman as an element of exchange constitutes one of the main cultural pillars of Indian culture, a materialistic and distant approach caused by tradition that constitutes a form of control over female sexuality. In Nisha Minhas' previous novels (2000, 2004) the reference was vague contrary to *TMM* (2006). Thus, as the narrator of the story considers,

Marrying the Indian way wasn't about love –never about love. Its rules were more closely based around commerce. Selling a product and that product being the bride. How good was she at cooking, how light was her skin tone, how tall was she, how well off were her family, how educated was she. All these attributes would be collectively added together and in not so many words a price would be attached to her.

(TMM 2006: 53)

It brings together some of the most universal stereotypes regarding women, her submission to the household as a housewife and that defines and determines a particular type of woman as the object of desire, images of women which were recurrent in conduct books through the centuries and that are still maintained in contemporary literature. Only this kind of woman as seen in the passage above will be eligible for an arranged marriage as she conforms to the dominant perspective and ideology, a model of woman that requires strengthening in order to reinforce social identities mainly in the blurring panorama of culture clash:

She would then go on sale to what some people call the arranged marriage system, but others might well refer to it as The Marriage Market.

(TMM 2006: 54)

It offers a more cynical and hypocritical vision of Indian culture which responds, once more, to the power of patriarchy and its denial of female freedom.

Between Jeena's proposal to marry Aaron to avoid an arranged marriage and Aaron's decision, one of the deepest thoughts comes into Aaron's mind, thoughts that lead to his marriage after listening to Jeena's father talk about his daughter as a possession,

Owned? Children aren't cars, or houses, or Rolex watches, you can't own a twenty-seven year old woman. Was this the way all Indian men thought? Was

ownership of Jeena transferred to her husband in India after the wedding?
Would she then become her husband's property?

(TMM 2006: 85)

Marina's responsibility and freedom to make her own decisions (*Passion and Poppadoms* 2004) is kept through the paradoxical criterion of what liberal parents should be in *The Marriage Market* (2006). In fact, while Jeena's parents (TMM 2006) consider themselves as liberal, and as such, tolerant of different kinds of behaviour and opinions, such consideration is not supported by their daughter on the grounds that she can feel free in everything concerning her life but the choice of her husband-to-be, even worse, as will be the case, in the choice for a mixed relationship. The acceptance of different behaviours in British society does not conform to Indian ideas in which under any apparent token of freedom to a British Asian individual there appears the preference for the obedience to the Indian way. Jeena's parents words to her daughter referred to her freedom to do what she wanted.

[the] secrecy of her relationship with Aaron would not be accepted because he was white and her parents' idea of being liberal parents didn't match up to her idea of what liberal parents should be.

(The MM 2006: 6)

The liberal message from the parents crashes against daily decisions and the female character questions her freedom and her parents' actual modern views on bringing up children. She was allowed out, a job and she didn't feel tied up, contrary to the feeling when it came to men; she was not allowed to choose one; it would be Maji and Papaji's decision. After finding their daughter with Aaron in bed, Maji stated that

We gave you much more freedom than most Indian parents would have allowed. (...) We hear stories all the time of girls running away from home because the parents are too strict.

(TMM 2006: 31)

As happens within their community and in order not to let their daughters go astray, parents reprimand their daughters with their community's advice. Thus,

Many people told us to marry you off quickly and by doing so you would not stray from the Indian path. Your father and I argued that by giving our children freedom, you would repay us with loyalty.

(TMM 2006: 31)

However, "as so many lenient parents realise when it's too late, their leniency is often repaid with betrayal" (TMM 2006: 142). Their daughter's experiences began to match her English friends' Kitty and Flora, sleeping around. Their hate campaign against Aaron for being a womaniser and using women to his own interests and then dumping them seems to change after his agreeing to marry Jeena as a favour. While Jeena agrees to a one-year friendship marriage to avoid going through an arranged marriage, thus, subverting her community's expectations of her as an Indian girl, her English friends suggest a marriage because of Aaron's money but that would mean that she became his slave. It is at this point where there seems to be no difference with the general conception of the woman in the Indian culture and British culture as regards the different role models. Despite what has been said above, Kitty and Flora did not have to care about the same issues she had to be concerned about such things as their parent's decision about their future husband, their virginity or the bearing of baby boys. This identity crisis is seen in,

Jeena became two different people. Eastern Indian girl at home and at the temple. And Westernized Indian girl at school and especially in the bike sheds.

(TMM 2006: 93)

and her parents' questioning about the sacrifices made in trying to fit between two cultures while sometimes it was already hard to fit in one, "Was it too much to expect a young girl to fit in with two cultures?" (TMM 2006: 93).

After such betrayal and Jeena's disownment, Aaron's role becomes crucial in his attempt to make Jeena's parents reconsider the situation and think about their daughter's happiness rather than tradition. Thus, in order to prove the non-existence of guarantees he addresses Paji's conscience, as can be shown in the following passage:

Can you honestly say that the man you would have chosen for her would have loved her the way I do? I don't think you can. We really are meant to be together. (...) I can't bear to see her beaten up with sorrow because you won't accept this choice she has made for herself. A choice which has made her happy.

(TMM 2006: 277)

What he is trying to do is to stop all the family feuding caused by Jeena's shameful marriage and come to a compromise. Jeena's father's reaction to Aaron's words gradually sets the pace to a reformulation of tradition, a reversal of the situation; what really matters is not honour and tradition but happiness. Having reached this point it is important to reproduce some of Paji's words to Aaron, words that have not appeared in the previous novels and which points to the success of the process of negotiation of tradition with the older generations and to a modified discourse on ethnic gender relations,

You proved to all of us how much you loved my daughter when you married her. It takes a lot of guts to go against the Indian way, Aaron, and as I have learnt, guts are something you're not lacking.

(TMM 2006: 278)

After this Jeena's parents forgive her and hold a sincere conversation of sincere making up and forgiveness, not of blaming and shaming.

As to the role of the brothers, and as considered in Chapter 2, the father or elder brother are responsible for important decisions for the whole extended family even in cases of wide geographical separation (Abercrombie 1994), this being one of the roles

attributed to them protectors. As an example of this, after going through an arranged marriage in *Chapatti or Chips* (2000), Sumita, Naina's elder sister, told her sister she was going through the same normal doubts she suffered. Suffering from a heavy burden of guilt for having betrayed her parents, having had sexual relationships with Dave and not being the perfect wife-to-be for Ashok, but being "a first-class Indian slut. Ashok deserved better" (*Ch or Ch* 2000: 247). It is to her older sister that Naina confesses her real feelings:

I'm dreading marrying him, Sunita. Mum doesn't stop talking about him. Dad... Well, he keeps congratulating himself at how well he's chosen. She spoke very quietly, He seems nice, but...oh I don't know.

(*Ch or Ch* 2000: 247)

These are the stereotypical feelings of any bride that preserves tradition and is unable to depart from it.

Sumita saw herself in Naina, "the fear. The worry. The dread." (*Ch or Ch* 2000: 380) Sumita tells her it is normal to feel this way but reminds her that he does not know her either. Naina carries on with her confession,

I've met a bloke. He's white. I love him not that he loves me. In fact, he's everything Dad tells us about white men everything.' (⋯) I can't get him off my mind and I can't marry Ashok knowing I love him.

(*Ch or Ch* 2000: 380)

With this she seems to be looking for some support and to go on with her real feelings. However, she finds the opposite and Sunita tells her to forget about forgetting Dave,

Forget him. It's not worth it. You go with him, you'll lose Mum and Dad. You know Mama ji would cut you out of the family as well, and then I'll never see you again. Do you want to lose your own family? Do you want to shame the family? Hurt Mum and Dad? Do you want to wreck your whole life over a

white man? You won't get better than Ashok, trust me. She paused. It's not our way.

(*Ch or Ch* 2000: 381)

As can be seen in this extract it is difficult to separate the individual from community identity as they always go hand in hand. In section 2.2.6.1 it was argued that the meaning and significance of identity becomes really important when applied to what are generally known as *community identities*. The emphasis on their community can be interpreted as the form of defence and protection regarding the strength of national identity as used by Hall. In addition, without power the characters concern themselves with the question of identity (Crane 2000) and this is related to the dissociative strategy identified by Hutnik (1991), where categorization is in terms of ethnic minority group membership. (See section 2.2.6.3).

Until now I have highlighted the role of the brothers as protectors and as a representation of the right conduct according to Indian culture. The complexity of the issue that concerns this thesis is also portrayed here. Thus, as maintained in Chapter 2, the education and upbringing is polarised for both men and women. While improper behaviour is automatically attributed to most Indian girls, Jeena's brother emphasises the opposite view; if his parents had known about his real whereabouts he would have been taken to a mental home,

Boozing, spliffing, whizzing, joyriding, shoplifting, anything with an 'ing' except for shagging, but he was planning very hard for that one. He was quite aware that Indian women and girls got the bad deal in an Indian household. It was a historical trend which had survived to the modern day.

(*The MM* 2006: 75)

These vices are a cruel stereotype on the white community but are secretly adopted by some members of the younger generations. Therefore, being aware of the extremes Indian girls had to go through, his thoughts refer not only the Indian parents' ignorance,

prejudices and wrong conceptions based on gender but also to a discourse by the younger generations' awareness of gender difference and culture.

As regards the role of the husband, one of the consequences of tradition is the lack of knowledge of the woman chosen by the parents and, with this, the adoption of wrong assumptions about the role of the partner. In Chila's case, one of Tania's friends in *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* together with Sunita, one of the main marriage problems is the lack of trust between the couple. As she states,

I always thought that our husbands were supposed to be our best friends.

(LHH 1999: 237)

Similarly, the failure in Sunita's marriage with Akkash has been the wife's submission to her husband and the lack of strength in confronting the situation due to the poor communication of the couple. Akkash's obsession with his job, in which there was no place for his wife's needs or demands does not find justification, and even worse than that, and as Sunita maintains "As a good Hindu girl, I should understand this" (LHH 1999: 77). Akkash' submersion in his job becomes the disguise under which to hide a situation difficult to solve and which is only understood considering Parikh's statement as seen in section 2.2.3, and of which I emphasise that "the man discovers that the only socially approved alternative available to him is to get over –involved in work or in other settings of the masculine world" (Parikh 1989: 150). While Samir (*S and S* 2003), an Indian man, blamed tradition for his inability to to go in search for his own happiness, Armin (*B and B* 2005) blamed his parents. As Samir states, he

[...] wasn't man enough to face his traditionally minded parents, sit them down, and see the disappointment in their faces as he told them he loved an English woman and wished to marry her.

(*S and S* 2005: 82)

The new discourse on cultural expectations does not involve a failure in the education Indian parents offer to their offspring but a new personal, social and cultural dimension

that contemporary society demands. The psychological battle derived from it led him to deliver tutoring lessons to his wife so that she knew how to act according to his actions, a man not with two personalities but with two modes,

[...] parent mode and non-parent mode. The prime characteristic of parent mode was agreement, agreement with anything the parents said!

(*S and S* 2003: 129)

This passage stands as another example of the submissive role, in the case of men this time, in relation to traditional parents and the externalised behaviour they are also subject to in a repetitive imposition of tradition. Regarding Armin, and similarly to Samir, he accepted his parents' decision on the choice of wife, settled himself in a luxury flat and helped with the family's business in order to satisfy his parents. As a consequence of his own failures his lack of moral strength was symbolically represented by the physical abuse of his wife, Zarleena. It was not until his first encounters with a white man helping her that his sense of guilt appeared for the first time.

From the moment he was not given enough respect by his family to be allowed to make his own decisions, as indicated above, his frustration and anger was reflected in the violent treatment given to his wife and his psychological battle to please both his Indian upbringing and living a life of his own, his wife becomes the target of his frustration. So is this any different from our female characters? I don't think so. He has become just another victim of a patriarchal society.

In this context the role of the wife as a submissive wife is transgressed. Thus the roles assigned to Avani, Kareena's sister, are as an observer, a carer, and a protector who warns Kareena about Samir's behaviour and strives to prevent any negative consequences deriving from it, a rather different message from Sunita in the previous novel. Her directness is maintained in her words,

We're going to let him know that this might have been his house once – now it's yours. Lay down the rules, otherwise he's going to treat you just like a

typical Indian woman, stuck cooking *dhal* in the kitchen while you're carrying his son and listening to his mother spouting off down the phone.

(*S and S* 2003: 51)

Only by confronting her husband, and thus, subverting her traditional role, will she be able to have a place of her own that allows a certain freedom for the self in a new discourse on gender. In the following passage, the new discourse on gender roles and tradition among the younger generations requires a gender equality beyond any power hierarchy. However, the girls' words are counterbalanced by their father's who still defends the maintainance of a patriarchal society and who, regardless of their wishes, is aware that they are still subject to his will:

We will not be ordered around, Avani would say. 'It's only fair that the man and woman are equal in the house and they get to share the workload. Kareena would add. But they both shrank to two inches high when their father glared at them and shouted, 'I don't tolerate fools lightly. Men are the strength in any family. Without us, the family would fall apart. Now whoever we choose for either of you, will be the man you will answer to. But for now, I am the man in your lives and you answer to me. Now, go and make the dinner and learn how to take orders'.

(*S and S* 2003: 297)

As has been indicated above, this passage, interrupted by their father, stands as a modified discourse on gender equality and a re-enactment of their roles. Therefore they are not asking for anything that goes far beyond their rights but for something fair and is an ironic statement on the apparent superiority of men; the actual force of the family is in the hands of women and not in the men's despite their ideological power. Furthermore they are aware of the strength of their gender and its ability to change the situation and redefine what being a woman has come to mean.

Contrary to *Saris and Sins* (2005) and *The Pocket Guide To Being An Indian Girl* (2004), JJ, Jeena's brother in *The Marriage Market* (2006), recognizes Jeena's courage:

In many ways he admired his sister for taking the risks she did; it was just a shame that his parents had caught her out in the bed.

(*The MM* 2006: 76)

He was aware of the

[...] extremes an Indian girl would go to so that she might live a life with some enjoyment.

(*TMM* 2006: 75)

In spite of the strictness of tradition and its expectations, the latter are broken on the first encounter between Naina and Ashok in Minhas' first novel *Chapatti or Chips* (2000). Being engaged to Ashok, the first conversation breaks with all the expectations imposed on them. Therefore he does not follow his parents' rules like a rule of thumb but he seemed caring; he is not even worried about children. "He seemed intelligent. (...) he was also direct, laying his cards on the table, opening his personality up." (*Ch or Ch* 2000: 36). Their worries are far beyond bringing up children or talking about India and doing nothing else; her worries were about unfaithfulness, lies and honesty while his were about trust and feeling comfortable around each other. Being another candidate for an arranged marriage in order not to lose her family she "accepted that Indian girls had to be respectful of Mum and Dad and all of India." (*Ch or Ch* 2000: 31), a girl who cannot go against Indian rules and traditions as it would be like "sticking a knife into her family's heart." (*Ch or Ch* 2000: 31).

I suppose your parents gave you the big speech of how to behave in front of me, just like my parents did?' Ashok asked.

Naina smiled and nodded.

He continued, 'Well, I'd rather you be yourself. Then I can see the real you. I hope that doesn't sound too rude'. (...)

He seemed very determined to let her know that he was not quite the Indian cliché of a husband -to -be.

(*Ch or Ch* 2000: 35)

Thus, this modified discourse of the first encounter before the wedding breaks with the stereotypes. The traditional distant meeting of the couple turns into a new discourse in which nature prevails over nurture, as opposed to conduct books, and as defended in this thesis, and consequently cultural behaviours are left apart in favour of the natural impulses of the individual. To Armstrong and Tennenhouse' idea that women could be *produced*, the codified rules that prepare them for the accomplishment of social duties are renegotiated in the couple's terms. With this, not only are they negotiating their future as a couple but they are also pointing to a new masculinity, the concept of a man who is no longer anchored in unmovable traditional patriarchal schemes. Despite what has been said above, this new form of masculinity is not retaken by the writer in her later novels as she focuses more on mixed relationships. Nevertheless, its significance can also be found in Manju Kapur's work in India.

If in Kapur's first novel, *Difficult Daughters* (1998), the parents initially choose their daughters' husband (the prospective candidate is refused and she finally marries the man she chooses), in the second one, *A Married Woman* (2003), the daughter looks for a husband in ads and then she shows them to her parents. Contrary to tradition, Hemant, the new future husband, dislikes dowry, possibly due to the Western influence after a long stay in America, which also breaks with his social expectations. Not being in favour of marrying an American girl as they were too demanding, as the only son he had responsibilities to his parents (*AMW* 2003: 40) which links to Parekk's statement on the social responsibility of the individual maintained above.

Before finishing this section and although the object is to focus on the psychological role of the male gender, I cannot forget the relevance of Namina's visit to Britain. Meena's initial reluctance to her grandmother's visit from India in *Anita and Me* (1996), which was noticed in the village, will soon change. As a

[...] beloved parent, a familiar symbol in her billowing *salwar kameez* suit whose slow deliberate gestures and modest dignity reminded them of their own mothers.

(*AM* 1996: 201)

dressed in her *salwar kameez*³, a traditional dress mainly worn by women in India, she represents the nostalgic view of the homeland and the traditional attributes and values that like dignity were disappearing in England, a symbol that seemed “an imported piece of exotica” (AM 1996: 220) it is not surprising that her first comment was on Meena’s behaviour,” Nanima said you are a “jungle”, a wild girl, uncivilised...’papa said” (AM 1996: 200), and which is reinforced by her father, “change, from a sweet happy girl into some rude, sulky monster” (AM 1996: 249).

Not only does she stand as a representation of the Motherland but also as the reality hidden behind the portrayal of her community in the media. Thus, her stories and anecdotes, as Meena claims, “sparked off by something on the television.” (AM 1996: 209). It is through her arrival that she discovers the secret world between mothers and daughters and gets to know a country linked to

[f]amily feuds in which the Land was revered and jealously guarded like a god, in which supernatural and epic events, murder, betrayal, disappearances and premonitions seemed commonplace, in which fabulous wealth and dramatic rituals were continually upstaged by marching armies and independence riots.

(AM 1996: 211)

It is through her grandmother that Meena’s interest and curiosity increases to the point of being able to understand her grandmother’s stories told in Punjabi with no need for help; a language she had initially refused to learn in full.

4.2.2.2 *Bewildering choices: Inner thoughts in the old East-West conflict*

First of all it is worth saying that the relationship between two different cultural communities, the Indian community and the British in our case, is far from an immediate

³ *Salvars* or *shalvars* are loose pajama-like trousers. The *kameez* is a long shirt or tunic. Salwars are gathered at the waist and held up by a drawstring or an elastic belt. It is sometimes known as ‘Punjabi suit’, in Britain and Canada. In Britain, especially during the last two decades, the garment has been transformed from an everyday garment worn by immigrant South Asian women from the Punjab region to one with mainstream, and even high-fashion appeal.

resolution. Thus being male or female, conformist or rebellious, wearing certain clothes, speaking in an apparently incorrect way, displaying a specific behaviour and responding to an institutionalised sexuality, all these things, become part of everyday discourse in a context of duality. This discourse not only entails a new reception of the traditional Indian message among the younger generations but also a new social panorama and the demands to conform to the combination of East and West. As Burdsey (2006: 23) states:

The lives of young, diasporic British Asians are grounded not only in the cultures and traditions of their parents and the Indian subcontinent, but also in the social practices of Britain and beyond, with increasing reference to globally mediated spheres such as football, music, fashion, style and consumption, combined with a localism based in their personal and urban landscapes.

In a way that the Indians' point of perspective to the construction of a femininity with traits and features of an ideology that does not characterise the culture, society and ideology of the British context. This originates a number of false stereotypes attributed to the two communities. The initial attraction for the different and the exotic becomes the tool with which to categorise a social and cultural group in the spheres of marriage, the family business, food, sexual practices, music, cinema and ornaments. Added to this, the the significance of Kama Sutra, the classic guide to lovemaking, reflecting the social and sexual traditions of the old times in India, as a sexual canon of conduct as regards the variety and accepted sexual positions does not distance itself from the strictness of Indian traditions and expectations on the individual. Being a book about the art of living; about finding a partner, maintaining power in a marriage, and above all, that lays down the different positions in sexual intercourse, it becomes one of the stereotypes about the Indians. The first time Dave asked Naina about arranged marriage, she looked a like rottweiler

Just because I'm fucking Indian does not mean that all those clichés are true: arranged marriages, corner shops, curries every night, Kama Sutra, watching *Gandhi* on video, watching Gandhi perform all sixty-four positions of the Kama Sutra, a thousand people fitting in one car, bhangra, Bollywood, bindis,

bangles and bollocks! Seething, Oh yeah, and us using an aubergine as a bloody dildo!

(*Ch or Ch* 2000: 163)

Normally the documentaries on Indians concentrate on some issues to the detriment of others, based on past issues rather than the present and the future and the consequences of tradition in the individual's psychological freedom leaving no place for individual histories. On some occasions this fact creates an initial cultural and social gap of information as regards the knowledge and perception of the British Asia teenagers by the white community and the creation of false stereotypes far from reality. The reduction of the Indian community to apparently right conceptions points to Cameron's (1988: 8) consideration that to "stereotype someone is to interpret their behaviour, personality and so on in terms of a set of common-sense attributions which are applied to whole groups".

The approach to the West-East conflict is twofold. On the one hand, cultural duality and collision are the direct cause of the psychological battle regarding the right choice in values as they will determine the female characters' identity and will foster a particular sexuality profile that uncovers only the simplest reality. On the other hand, the opposition West-East serves as a partial justification of the strength of the Eastern values among the oldest generations in England. In fact, the Eastern values are defended as the most pure, respectful, dignifying and honourable principles contrary to a Western world in which all the values are portrayed as corrupting, valueless and without consideration for the individual and for the institution of the family. The first generation immigrants need to keep their cultural heritage intact within and outside the household clashes against the reality hidden in Western society. It is mainly due to this clash that some of the key Asian values like *sharam* (modesty and humility) and *izzat* (honour) tumble down in the name of tradition and family pride. Defying them involves a change from the expected female behaviour.

As to the first perspective, I share Parekh's (2003: 6) point in stating that

Asian children growing up in non-Asian areas are deeply confused, insecure, tense, anxious, ashamed of their past, (...) and display disturbing patterns of thought, feeling and behaviour.

Nevertheless, these factors cannot be considered as inborn traits but as the result of the clash of cultures and tradition causing an identity crisis in British-Asian born females:

But while Naina was laughing on the outside, her insides were crumbling; westerns and eastern ideas battling against one another. It was as though she was torn in the middle. Parents, tradition and culture on one side. Liberty, love and lust on the other. She wished she could talk to her mum, she wished she was closer to her mum, but Indian girls never get too close to their mums, because there are certain things that 'you just don't talk about', like fear of arranged marriage, fear of that first night, fear that he might turn out to be a bastard; and they don't certainly talk about love and lust. Oh yeah, you just don't go round telling them that you've got the hots for a white, womanizing pig.

(*Ch or Ch* 2000:111)

In this passage, as in many others, the psychological battle stands as the means to satisfy the social battle. Nevertheless, this discourse on the traditional women's expectations and the lack of communication between mother and daughter, as it is something dictated by tradition and there is no possibility of either criticisms or discussion, will be modified and renegotiated in later novels (*Saris and Sins, The Marriage Market*). The cultural opposition against the acquisition of Western patterns of behaviour is not understood in the same terms by the younger generations as they have been born and brought up with it. This behaviour does not give place to naturalness and affection;

But what constructed misbehaviour? Being kissed on the cheek by a white man was definitely in that category. Flirting, showing too much skin, entering Miss Wet Sari competitions. Misbehaviour in Indian society covered so many situations that the safest way for an Indian child to not misbehave was to

copy David Blaine⁴ and have themselves frozen in a block of ice. Even then some Indian granny would complain that each time the child was needed for chapatti-making duty, they took too long to defrost. It was all about rules ...and a suitable punishment for breaking them.

(*B and B* 2005: 167)

This valueless and corrupting view of society does not only include behaviour, and within this I include conduct with the elders, but also language derived from a comment on the so called *Front Garden dilemma* (*TPG* 2004); how the garden frippery and gnomes was something English, a way to mark their territory as well as the fence in *A Married Woman* (1996) marked the territory between their English neighbours and Meena's Indian family gardens. The psychological separation between the two communities is marked by a physical location. As a mode of example, I could outline the opinion held by Anita's Aunties who had their own collected proverbs on English behaviour. As they state,

They [the English] treat their dogs like children, no, better than their children (⋯) They expect their kids to leave home at sixteen, and if they don't, they ask for rent! Rent from your kids!

(*AM* 1996: 33)

or the use of the word *piece* being a peculiar Tollington, a fictional mining village in England, word for sandwich which Anita's mother had banned her from saying in the house and which outlines a key issue concerning the adoption of the good aspects of culture (used by Hairy Nelly). The criticism in the use of specific vocabulary that for Anita constitutes a part in the normal process of language evolution and generation change develops into an ethnicity consciousness. This consciousness is transformed into an implied moral code being the first Indian family in Tollington. On the parents' side the use of a new teenage lexicon will inevitably lead to a morally wrong behaviour in a cause-effect relationship. As Anita's mother maintains,

⁴ He is an American illusionist and stunt performer. He made his name as a performer of street and close-up magic. His father is Puerto-Rican and his mother was Jewish of Russian descent.

Just because the English can't speak English themselves, does not mean you have to talk like an urchin. You take the best from their culture, not the worst. You'll be swearing and urinating in telephone boxes next, like that Lowbridge boy ...'

(AM 1996: 53)

This attitude is taken a step forward and points to democracy and the refusal of the concept of individuality which was already outlined in Chapter 2. The next extract is stereotyped by Meena's mother; Mrs Christmas' love and protection for Meena makes the latter think that she may regard her as a daughter for the lack of her own sons and grandchildren. Conversely, her mother breaks with this lack of knowledge and becomes the cause of another stereotype about the English:

I'll never understand this about the English, all this puffing up about being civilised with their cucumber sandwiches and cradle of democracy big talk, and then they turn round and kick their elders in the backside, all this It's My Life, I Want my Space stupidity, You Can't Tell Me What To Do cheekiness. (···) We all have obligations, no one is born on their own.

(AM 1996: 59)

It turns into one of her mother's capital letters speeches and indirect conduct subtext about what not to do.

It is the fear of the parents of their daughters sharing their life with a white man that brings one of the most universal stereotypes in *The Marriage Market* (2006); Jeena leaves home for a few days to marry Aaron. Given her father's worry for his sister's disappearance and the thought of her sharing her time with a white man, there comes the East-West opposition:

This was one of the reasons why the Western way of life was so incompatible with the Eastern way. Only muggers, murderers, burglars, drunks, homeless and freaks walk free in the middle of the night.

(*The MM* 2006: 79)

While for the British the Indians are seen as hardworking, exotic and anchored in tradition, the British are seen as muggers, murderers, burglars and lacking in morals by the older generations and by the most traditional members of the second generation British Asians. All this is due to the maintenance of the traditional Indian discourse and responds to Eckert and McConnell-Ginet's consideration that

Gender and social category are not constructed independently of each other nor do they exist independently of practice, rather, they are continually coconstructed in the course of day-to-day practice (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1995: 478)

Thus, the members of each community consider the other members not to be in possession of the truth and the appropriate code of conduct.

Stereotypes and prejudices are not only assigned to the white community regarding the Asian immigrants, and to any foreign element, by extension, but also the whites are doing it in the defence and justification of their culture and tradition as referred to above. On Zarleena's parents' arrival in England, the existence of open rules concerning sex was the cause of concern and the reason for the restriction of their daughters' outdoor activities to the temple, the school and the library. The only way with Indian girls was being strict to maintain the old values. In fact, in a society with a Eastern -Western values opposition a greater control was necessary in order for their offspring not to fall into morally wrong temptations.

When Indian families first took up residence in Britain, Asian families were extremely controlling. They didn't want their values diluted by Western philosophies. A strict code of conduct was expected to be adhered to by all children. No parties, no booze, no fax, no sex, no dates, no going out, no Valentines, no drugs, no rock `n`roll...NO LIFE.

(*B and B* 2005: 239)

Reciprocally, this strictness conferred British –Asian teenagers a stronger desire for the runaway. It was then that worse cases could be heard off, that the rules and control

imposed by the parents decreased and allowed a certain degree of freedom. It was when, as indicated in Zarleena's thoughts,

Suddenly the life of a British-born Asian didn't seem so bad. Their freedoms were partially given back to them, their parents' trust in them reinstated, their privacy their own.

(*B and B* 2005: 240)

Nevertheless such strictness did not lead to untouchable Indian ideals but the obligation on the part of the older generations to change their attitude and reduce the number of individuals who rejected the Indian way. Part of this runaway was due to the parents' strictness but partly to the awareness of the fact that they have grown up, the Western culture.

Despite being aware of the fact that things would have been different if she had been born a generation later, Zarleena is also conscious that she would have had to go through an arranged marriage any way. She knew the individual's submission had started to change for the better as he/she was taking the reins over his/her freedom. In a similar way and after Aaron's protection of Jeena in *The Marriage Market* (2006),

All we ever wanted was for you to be happy, Jeena, ' he began, his attention aimed towards his daughter. 'When you were born, your mother and I promised that we would do whatever it took to give you a life of fulfilment. Something which would have been impossible in India. We were generous with the amount of freedom we gave you. We were extremely lenient with our rules. We just wanted you happy.' He paused. 'And we still do. This is why we accept your marriage to Aaron and this is why we want to make you a suggestion.

(*TMM* 2006: 311)

In the consensus, Jeena accepts her parents' proposal to have a Sikh wedding and make it official in front of the *Guru Granth Sabih*. Nevertheless, her uncle's refusal to accept her niece's secret marriage, leads to him kidnapping to make her study the *Guru*

Granth Sabih until her marriage in India. Beyond Indian restrictions of behaviour, the easy access to drugs, alcohol and sex in Britain highlight the prevalence of social vices over moral values and makes it hard to resist them as part of contemporary life. This situation reduces gender polarization, and with this, the distinct gender roles to be accomplished by men and women. In Jeena's uncle's opinion,

No wonder his niece Jeena had succumbed to temptation when it was everywhere. In the streets, in the parks, on the TV, in the newspapers. Little by little Great Britain had lost its great and little by little the people of Great Britain had lost the world's respect. Drugs were cheaper than chips nowadays and women were drinking as heavily as men. Fashion was more important than self-respect. Who had the better or who wore the Armani clothes. The gutters were filled with pushers and pimps and sex before marriage was almost a given.

(TMM 2006: 429)

Although alcohol has been consumed from ancient times in India it was never positively regarded. It is regarded as polluting but in some Indian states its prohibition does not constitute a religious but a social concern. Nowadays, the situation is changing and its consumption has been extended due to Western influence. In Britain, modernization and the West are concepts that the members of the second generation have not borrowed but born with. Old manners, respect and social and cultural gender polarity are opposed to capitalism, globalisation and gender equality, the latter being understood in terms of similar behaviour.

One of the most striking differences between East and West is the individuality of the couple and the gender polarization regarding their role. While English men go to work and to the pub after, women are kept within the household, their separate lives are beyond reach between individuals that should walk in the same tune together with "an absence of sentiment and a boldness of self which I could not see in my parents' almost claustrophobic connection." (AM 1996: 86)

As for our married English neighbours, I sometimes had difficulty matching up the husbands to their wives as their lives seemed so separate. They were the women, like the Yard women, who stayed home whilst their menfolk slipped out to work, too early for me to match them. And then the others like the Ballbearings Committee, whose men waved them off to work and then gathered together in the evenings in the local pub, the Mitre, or the Working Men's Club, leaving their wives to create havoc together at the rival female venues, the bingo hall, or the Flamingo Nightclub near their factory.

(AM 1996: 85)

The West-East conflict also embraces British-born females regarding their physical appearance. A doll she broke, a brown barbie doll's neck.

Brown because at five years of age Marina felt she couldn't identify with a white Barbie doll and had rebelliously dyed her doll's face and hair with henna. So barbie the Blonde Beautiful became Barbijit the Brown Paraplegic.

(P and P 2004:171)

This action can be interpreted not only as the result of the identity crisis suffered as a young girl but about the refusal of the stereotype about how the perfect woman should be; a type she could never fit and that increased her desire for rebellion. In *Bindis and Brides*, published a year later, Armin compared the Indian women from India and the Indian women brought up in England to hens, well behaved, strictly confined, a servant to their master. While

British-born Indian women were free-range hens, able to run wild, with too much freedom –and ultimately too much mouth.

(B and B 2005: 288)

In the middle of the East and West a new breath of air is noticeable. A few years ago it would have been unthinkable for Indian girls to be visible in a restaurant.

No wonder Indian kids born in Britain have a rosy future to look forward to, the gold path of destiny having been laid by the many generations of Indians before them. They have their parents to thank for this. From the moment they are born, they live indebted.

(*B and B* 1005: 238)

However, there was still a long way to go to the end where the vision of mixed couples is met without any prejudice or surprise. Currently the acceptance of a white man by an Indian girl was still seen as that she

[...] had opted against the wishes of her parents and gone against tradition. If not so many words, it meant that she was a traitor.

(*B and B* 2005: 239)

In this section I have been dealing with the conflict derived from the West-East dichotomy, the main cause being the existence of a diversified moral code. It has been mainly applied to the apparent *devils* of Western culture. Notwithstanding, and in a more indirect way, an implicit code also lays in the white community among teenagers. As a mode of example, a key element in the Anita-Meena's gang in Meera Syal's first novel, was a pile of copies of *Jackie*," a teenage magazine which formed the basis of my sex education for the next few years" (*AM* 1996: 137), as Meena states. It was all about boys,

How to attract them, keep them, get rid of them (at least, the ugly one), how to transform a boeing Denia mini-skirt into a wild disco outfit by using a few of your dad's old ties and a tube of glitter, where highlighter actually goes, what Donny Osmond's favourite colour was, what kind of chick attracted David Cassidy and why having spots was not a valid reason for suicide.

(*AM* 1996: 137)

These are tips on how to attract a man, regarded as the basic protocol and the best behaviour and attitudes to adopt to achieve such an aim in spite of the opposition from Indian culture and the pressures and changes suffered by the main female character.

Sushi, the main character in *The Pocket Guide To Being An Indian Girl* (2004), is always striving to be tougher and go beyond the social rules and expectations imposed on her. For such an aim she suffers from a very distant and tense relationship with the members of her family, mainly her mother, a controlling woman. Not only has she to put up with a traditional mother, sister and aunt Worzel but also the rebellious attitude of her brother's friends and her brother's shouting of obscenities. She tries to survive between two conflicting cultures, the one imposed on her and the one given in England, the one given by her parents' birth and background and another lived from birth, a restrictive and a freer one. However, and in spite of what has been considered above, it is not a crisis particularly attached to her as a *British-Asian* girl but common to every teenager on a universal scale. As she says,

I wanted to be like the rest of the people around me. People who were good at making small talk, good at becoming qualified counsellors, people who were chosen to give speeches at the last minute. I wanted to be a blend-in person. A Bip. An acronym, that's all I wanted to be.

(TPG 2004: 105)

Her father was the only person who believed in her. She hid him in the allotment so that nobody could find him. It is to her that she confesses his hatred of the Rais which does not require of any further explanation apart from the fact that "That Rai wants your mum" (TPG 2004: 136). Rai, Pardeep's dad, and future Kully's father-in-law defines himself as a self-made man and a philanthropist, definitions that do not match his real actions. Being the owner of several corner shops in the poor area of town he bid to run for mayor of Dudley although he lives in Birmingham. Sushi's hatred of the Rais, and consequently, his opposition to his daughter to go to the Rais is due to the Rais' love for his wife. He became the cause of Sushi's father unhappiness since his youth. At this time Sushi's mother's choice of his father rather than the Rais did not prove successful and the more Rai achieved in life, unlike Sushi's father, the gap between the couple, Sushi's parents, increased. Now he had to get accustomed to the presence of the Rais in his family after his daughter's marriage to Pardeep.

In the relationship between father and daughter, after a long time the wedding was the occasion for them to laugh together,

I'm not much of a crier. I know girls are supposed to be but I'm an emotional retard when it comes to that, so I found it strange that I was suddenly trying to fight back tears. I found it even stranger that they were winning. I'd never told him I loved him; you don't really have to. 'It's all in the actions, 'Dad says, and he's right. I mean, what was the 'I love you' that Mum said to him that night he went away?

(TPG 2004: 186)

Before their trip to India. Sushi found it difficult to find answers but she "wasn't going to India to seek them out" (TPG 2004: 233) for the more answers she found the more questions she got.

We cannot conclude this section without an example passage in which the same situation of identity cases affects men. In the following passage identity is defined in terms of colour rather than feelings and birth. Like the British-female characters, Samir becomes another victim of tradition and the target of cultural impositions. While for the Indian community he becomes an emblem for the preservation of a pure identity, his condition as a British-Asian teenager bestows him with a sense of location that detaches him from the motherland and the burden of responsibilities imposed from the outside. Furthermore, the initial success of the power hierarchy of the father over the son will be defied after Samir's first meeting with a white woman, Cloey, more interested in his money than on this personality,

[Samir and father] 'You're an Indian. Look at yourself in the mirror. Now clap for India.'

'But we live in London, 'Samir had protested.

'Shut up and clap for India. And boo for England.'

Case closed.

An identity crisis. Forever trying to be both Indian and English.

(S and S 2003: 83)

Consequently, he is caught in an identity crisis with parents who always praised their motherland and also blamed the host country for trying to lead him astray. He became “sick of every Tom, Dick and Harriet asking him the correct way to cook jashasha hunza baltit with Uncle Ben’s rice. Sick of it all, until he met Cloey”(S and S 2003: 83). The initiation of his relationship with Cloey, a white woman, as indicated above, brings a new awakening in the prevalence of apparent love over family and marriage duties. Notwithstanding, the new scale of priorities will be bound to fail on the discovery of Cloey’s real consciousness of race superiority.

Samir’s father highlighting of Indianness based on colour skin rather than feelings, taught his son to be proud of his roots matches Jeena’s uncle (*TMM*), a defender of national identity in India.

As in a battle the soldiers have to defend themselves from any threat of attack, the Indian community needs to harden the rules and enforce a correct code of conduct as they realise the threat from the host community. All the differences, stereotypes and clichés regarding the two communities are the result of a double sided message of a world in constant evolution on the one hand and the insistence on the transmission of a message whose reception is either disobeyed, transgressed and/or subject to redefinition and negotiation on the other. Thus, the stereotypes of the English confirm Tajfel’s (1981: 161) defence of social stereotypes as the maintainance and reinforcement of group beliefs. While some of the points considered above apply to the English the apparent defects of character and behaviour function to discredit the group, offering an oversimplified conception of the English

4.2.2.3 *Identity and peer friendship*

As was observed in Chapter 2, Berzoff (1989: 54) outlined that “peer relationships, especially female friendships, are valuable sources of self-knowledge and identity development for girls”. This identity formation is clearly represented by Meena, the female character in Meera Syal’s first novel *Anita and Me* (1996), who tries to be

part of a gang in order to be accepted in her neighbourhood. This recognition is shaped into the form of Anita Rutter, who ruled over all the kids in the yard although during the process of identity development she also discovers a world of betrayal, disappointment and secrets that lead to the realisation that “Anita and me had never been meant for each other” (AM 1996: 282).

Being aware of her Asian heritage and her difference from the English leads Meena, whose life was “outside the home, with Anita, my passport to acceptance” (AM 1996: 148), into a desire, at the age of ten, to take her childhood away. This separation involves distancing herself from her childhood friends, whom she finds boring “for they are polite and sweet and enjoy spending time with their family” (AM 1996: 148), and a desire to open up new friendship bonds shaped in the form of Anita, an English girl. The closeness between her childhood friends and their families is defended as Meena states as,

A description that fitted all the Indian girls I knew, all the daughters of friends and relatives who would land in our house after a cramped journey wedged between two fat aunties.

(AM 1999: 149)

This description is opposed Anita Rooter’s position in the neighbourhood. It is by being part of her gang that she feels socially and culturally accepted in her “walking toward a certain destination” (Tofantsuk 2007: 113), a social and cultural acceptance, although such acceptance will not be completely fulfilled. The experience of difference, betrayal, racial hatred, death and the need to begin a new life in a new context will induce a reaffirmation of her identity and a place she had never found before. As Rocío Davis (1999: 141) points out the myths easily identified in *Anita and Me* are

[t]he awareness of difference and the struggle to understand one’s cultural uniqueness, coupled with an obsession to fit in the mainstream; the recognition and affirmation of a hybrid identity; the need to escape; the drama of choice; the question of home; and the creation and establishment of the new self in a particular setting.

The awareness of difference is outlined from the very beginning through her mother,

[...] being a simple Punjabi girl suffering from culture shock, marooned and misplaced in Wolverhampton.

(AM 1996: 9)

It is later reinforced by racial hatred, social and cultural difference, different behaviour patterns and the disappointment at the development of her relationship with Anita as outlined above. She sees herself as a member of a minority culture that needs some affirmation and security so as to achieve social acceptance. Shortly after reaching the age of ten,

I knew I was a freak of some kind, too mouthy, clumsy and scabby to be a real Indian girl, too Indian to be a real Tollington wench, but living in the grey area between all categories felt increasingly like home. And Anita never looked at me the way my adopted female cousins did; there was never fear or censure or recoil in those green, cool eyes, only the recognition of a kindred spirit, another mad bad girl trapped inside a superficially obedient body. In fact, sometimes when I looked into her eyes, all I could see and cling to was my own questioning reflection.

(AM 1996: 150)

Anita's relationship with a boy fills her with a sense of loneliness she had always fought against but that allows the passage to her maturity. It is then that Meena is able to face her situation on her own and continue without her old friend's support,

[...] and I knew whatever she had been leaving me was only what she had left over from him, the scraps, the tokens, the lies. I had fought for this friendship, worried over it, made sacrifices for it, measured myself against it, lost myself inside it, had little to show for it but this bewildered sense of betrayal. Now I knew that I had never been the one she loved, I was a convenient diversion, a practice run until the real thing came along to claim her.

(AM 1996:277)

Boys have won the battle over friendship and she wakes to one of her disappointments in life, disappointments which do not depend on culture but on the human condition. Furthermore she realises that friendship does not involve a battle in equal terms but on one of the members working harder for its maintainance.

In her second novel, *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (1999) it is through the development of three friends, Chila, Tania and Sunita that Syal shows the different choices in the field of identity redefinition and their strategies to live in accordance with a multicultural society. While Chila “met the future with innocence “(LHH 1999: 174), Sunita, had to get an education and then think about marriage, if she wanted. Contrary to other parents, they refer to marriage as assisted marriage as “We help, we advice and we leave it to her” (LHH 1999: 149), a term used by Ahmad et Lissenburgh (2003: 36) together with arranged introduction. The third friend, Tania, was “somewhere in the middle” (LHH 1999: 149); being of humble origins she attempted a few introductions as a process she had to go through; “she had already prepared a likely script” (LHH 1999: 174). “She is too modern” too independent to do as he says and maybe a bit of a slapper; “She is too Western” (LHH 1999: 150) and speaks bad Punjabi.

Whereas in the previous novel friendship is initially interpreted as the path to achieve social acceptance, now Tania’s betrayal of her friends making a programme about their lives behind their back creates a tense relationship. The decision to make this programme develops into a controversial conversation between Deepak and Tania with a significant ideological weight. In Tania’s words,

Getting to know someone and trying to own them is not the same thing. If she says yes because you’ve got bigger muscles than her, what she probably means is no. Why do you think women have to be such good liars? Especially our women? And how are you ever going to know the difference? Scared people never tell the truth. Do they?

(LHH 1999: 136)

As exemplified in this passage, the superior status of men in Indian society hides the cruelty in the forced silence of women drawn from their submission and fear, feelings

which are hardly noticed by men as part of a system in which they are not only unable to realise their errors but where their ego does not allow them to see beyond their unscrupulous power. Despite Tania's attempt to modify this gender discourse her effort is vain. As Deepak states in a conversation with Tania,

I don't need to fight you for her,' he said slowly,` however many pseudo-feminist sayings you want to use to justify your career plan. I love her enough to let her make her own mind up. But I'll be watching you.

(LHH 1999: 136)

Thus, the friendship between members of the same culture also brings to the front some of the basic realities of the human condition.

In one way or another the constraints of Indian culture do not let the younger generations enjoy their teenage years. While from the point of view of a British-Asian individual their parents' behaviour responds to a strict set of rules dictated by tradition and the obligation of their offspring to comply with them, for the English parents these restrictions are not only difficult to understand but they let happiness prevail over culture. To Kate's eyes, Naina's English friend, the Indian strictness was causing her Indian friends [Naina and Leena] to be "missing out on the fun of teenage years, which definitely included rampant boys" (*Ch or Ch* 2000: 142).

Contrary to the other characters I will analyse later, Kate's refusal to talk about arranged marriage is due to her impossibility to understand it. Despite the difficulty of understanding the pressures of the Indian system because she was not for not being a member of their community her duty towards her Indian friends, Leena and Naina, was not connected to the traditional Indian code. As she states her

[...] duty as a friend was to lead them astray as much as possible before they married and they ended with a man so straight and slick frick, you'd think he was walking with Granth Sahib in his back pocket.

(*Ch or Ch* 2000: 143)

This passage carries the message that “what parents don’t know, won’t harm them” (*Ch or Ch* 2000:142). It was also Kate who saw the change in Naina, a change in which old unreleased thoughts became real actions as an assertion of power,

Before she would have a drink, now she would get drunk. Before she would talk about men, now she blew them.

(*Ch or Ch* 2000: 142)

One of the friends’ roles is honesty and advice in specific situations in a way that knowledge and experience are shared. On the Indian front, Leena, Naina’s Indian friend, makes Naina feel responsible for what she did, have sexual relationships before marriage, and she uses the same structure used by Kiran above to raise her sense of guilt; repetition of the structure *have you thought...?*, the use of the verb *hope* and the adverb *honestly*:

Have you thought of what will happen on your wedding night, when Ashok realizes you’re not a virgin? Have you thought about that? For God’s sake, Naina, you’re going to be on your own with a strange family. You hear stories of what these families do to girls that are seconds. I just hope that Dave was worth it. You could lose your whole family over this. ‘She looked hard at Naina. ‘Honestly, Naina, where the hell are you going to hide this syringe full of red dye? In your dowry!?’ Another one of Dave’s crap ideas.

(*Ch or Ch* 2000: 231)

By making a double direct reference to her conscience with the verb ‘think’ Leena reminds her that she is not unaware of what happens to other girls who go through the same situation. With Naina’s last sentence, Leena’s objective has been definitely accomplished. Therefore in only a few lines she covers some key points, conscious as she is of the social implications of her actions: virginity, family and dowry, of which the first two are the ones that Leena knows will hurt her more, and although the latter has been made illegal by the Indian Parliament, the tradition still continues in India and Britain.

In the same line, on her next first encounter with Dave, he reprimands Leena for having gone to bed with him being an Indian girl. Before her departure, Dave states, not without irony

Before you leave, Leena, ' (...) `next time you put your hands over me, remember you're Indian!

(*Ch or Ch* 2000: 241)

In spite of her hatred for Dave she designs a plan for him to realise that Naina is the woman for him. As is the case in the other Indian protagonists, mainly females as they are our main concern, Samir needs a trusted friend's advice so as to overcome the psychological crisis. Nevertheless he does not obey Gilbert's advice about forgetting his parents and wife and concentrating on hidden happiness.

In *Passion and Poppadoms* (2004), friendship is broken by Stuart's jealousy, given the impossibility of being with Thomas' girlfriend. This fact leads to lies, deceit and false appearances once more. In chapter 2 I highlighted that one of the pillars of a good friendship is trust. The latter is broken between Marina and Emily as contrary to what they established; Marina's decisions regarding men were not decided between the two of them. This was complicated by the fact that the very same person who made the oath broke it. Friendship is also diluted between Stuart, a character moved by jealousy and who becomes a thorn in Thomas' side. Not only do Marina and Thomas argue because of Thomas' relationships with one of his lovers but also because of the impossibility of Thomas showing his love for Nicole, Thomas' girlfriend. Thomas' jealousy becomes a battlefield even as far as sexual relationships are concerned. Indeed it is one of the areas in which a man can be beaten more easily;

Women were such riddles. How could a whole group of women possibly believe that Thomas could be better in bed than him?

(*P and P* 2004: 155)

Continuing with this idea of trust, a distinction can be established between a member of the same and a different culture. As to the first case, we find in *Passion and*

Poppadoms, Nicole and Emma about the rumours of Thomas' infidelity (*P and P* 2004: 252) or Thomas and Nathan after having slept with Marina and Thomas' need for help. It was about values. It was about class. It was about ideologies. It was about...*Colour*, as Nathan asks him to admit. Doubts, insecurity and confused feelings lead to Thomas' belief that cultures should not mix. Nevertheless, the main problem was that he cannot really accept that he had fallen for a girl who was not "blonde and not upper class and who doesn't fit into your neat little package of what a woman should be." (*P and P* 2004: 381), no woman before had changed him. His obsession reaches to the point that their conversations are all about India, racism and Pakis (See 4.2.4.3). This discussion turns into one of the most controversial issues as regards the presence of a white man in the Indian household.

4.2.3 An element of cultural distortion

Section 4.2.2.2 outlined the different so called evils affecting the development of the younger British-Asian teenagers. This attribute is longer personified by white male individuals, regarded as a threat to the continuation of the principles of Indian culture by Indian parents since there is a chance of white men meeting their daughters. These characters, taken from Nisha Minhas, Dave, a womaniser (in *Chapatti or Chips*), Jordan, an ex-prisoner (in *Saris and Sins*), Thomas, a member of the upper class (in *Passion and Poppadoms*), Joel, a climber and a womaniser (in *Bindis and Brides*), Aaron (in *The Marriage Market*) and Cory (in *Tall, Dark and Handsome*) present a twofold role. On the one hand, they respond to the need to confront Indian parents with their cultural conceptions and help them understand the circumstances of their offspring, they are British-born, so that they realise the inappropriateness of their Indian attitudes within the context of modern British society. This fact shows that Indian parents can be impotent when it comes to preventing their children from reflecting on and rethinking their attitudes towards Indian culture especially when a new culture is introduced to them by a member of the native British society. On the other, as a consequence of a complicated childhood of loneliness, isolation and some tragic event like their parents' death, these characters need to prove something for themselves, mainly the existence of

other ways for finding love and support that liberates them from their fears. In some cases they will take their lives to the extreme through mountain climbing or sleeping around refusing any type of commitment and fearing a further failure and in the end, as will be examined later, the friendship with an Indian girl will evolve until it reaches an interracial marriage. The gender relationships emerging from this will be as complex as the complication involved in the failed attempt to hide the real feelings for an Indian woman with cultural and social limitations. But the hidden truth is that the individuals from the two communities need each other to escape from their most immediate surrounding and relief from a constant tension.

In an interview by Shelina Begum for the *Asian News*, (1.6.2005), on the publication of her fourth book *Bindis and Brides* (2005) Nisha Minhas remarked that

Zarleena, an Asian girl falling for a white guy is nothing new either. There are so many Indian girls in mixed marriages/relationships and this is hardly ever explored in books. I myself am in a mixed relationship but novels I have read in the past have never dealt with experiences that I can relate to.

In order to examine these issues I will go through the part of the writer's primary bibliography chronologically. To start with *Chapatti or Chips* (2000) focuses on the tense relationship between Naina and Dave and the strange mixture of lies, desire, secrets and seduction that finally lead to eternal love; two "different people from two very different lives" (*Ch or Ch* 2000: 7). Having been abandoned by his mother at an early age, his childhood will always haunt him and his relationship with his friends and women will become controversial. Not only did he hate talking about marriage and childhood but his life was focused on women and sex. His main problem is "women, not woman" (*Ch or Ch* 2000:9). "He is always lost in his own world, his own naked world of the opposite sex" (*Ch or Ch* 2000: 46). His incapability of forming deep human relationships as a result of a difficult childhood leads him towards the search for sex which does not involve commitment but selfishness and the submission to natural instincts in a way that not only is its treatment trivialised but it also becomes the *raison d'être*.

Yet, even though she felt compelled to return the honesty, to tell him about her arranged marriage, she was afraid that doing so would maybe lead to sympathy. And sympathy was something she *never ever* wanted.

(*Ch or Ch 2000: 63*)

A proof of personal pride and shame for not being strong and determined enough to oppose her parents. Conversely, and as their relationship develops, he, Dave, is the first to whom she confesses she does not want to marry Ashok but she has to do so as she was “fucking Indian” (*Ch or Ch 2000: 117*). In the same trusting way, it is to her that he talks about his unhappy childhood:

How do you tell someone that you had a bastard of a step dad who treated you like shit? How do you tell someone that your mum betrayed you, and your real dad, when you cried for help, ignored the cries?

(*Ch or Ch 2000: 78*)

Dave’s lack of support and affection in his childhood years makes it impossible to rely on anyone. Thus, it is through the fear of betrayal that they fulfil their sexual needs without emotional involvement and with no further commitment. They create their own self defence strategies. However this will all change after meeting and making friends with an Indian woman. As Dave states,

I am torn up about my past. My parents didn’t love me, nobody loved me, poor Dave. So, I just can’t trust anyone. If I get close to a woman, she’ll let me down, just like my family did all those years ago. He chuckled. `So I have...a defence mechanism, I shut all feeling out, I dump the women after three dates, just in case I begin to have feelings for them. I can’t let that happen, because of my awful awful past. I am a desperate case.

(*Ch or Ch 2000: 313*)

He is afraid to love someone as it would change his life and he likes it as it is. She even goes as far as breaking some of the strictest Indian rules. Therefore she is not

what would be considered a good Indian girl. Having had sex before marriage, and with a white man, she gets drunk to forget her worries concerning Ashok, she does not really do what her parents expect of her and, among other issues, she does not finally marry the man chosen for her.

As dictated by tradition Naina, is another candidate for an arranged marriage and in order not to lose her family. She “accepted that Indian girls had to be respectful of Mum and Dad and all of India.” (*Ch or Ch* 2000: 31), a girl cannot go against Indian rules and traditions as it would be like “sticking a knife into her family’s heart.” (*Ch or Ch* 2000: 31). Her inner feelings and doubts made it necessary to confide in someone, Dave, a member of the white community. However, every time she tries to tell him about her concerns there is something that pushes her back. She becomes hesitant:

Fucking hell Naina, marriage is for insecure people, how many times have I told you? He is reprimanding her as he had already told her about it. She had been warned about what would happen to her. He sparked up another fag, forgetting the fag still smoking in the ashtray. “Anyway [he is getting into her own ground in an attempt of acceptance], if you want to get caught in the doom and gloom of a bitter marriage, swamped in misery, all I can say is congratulations.’ He leaned over and kissed her on the cheek. `So why the long face? You should be happy, shouldn’t you? ´

(*Ch or Ch* 2000: 66)

She seems to be looking for agreement although she shouldn’t be complaining as is what she wanted.

Being engaged to Ashock, an Indian boy who breaks with all the expectations imposed on him, who does not follow his parents’ rules like a rule of thumb but who seemed caring; not even worried about children and who is aware of the importance of the woman’s own space, a new space beyond traditional conduct opens,

He seemed intelligent (...) he was also direct, laying his cards on the table, opening his personality up.

(*Ch or Ch 2000: 36*)

This modified discourse moves beyond the bringing up of children or talks about India and concentrates on more significant and vital issues such as unfaithfulness, lies, honesty, trust and feeling comfortable around each other. Nevertheless the novel *Chapatti or Chips* (2000) finally develops into the choice between the partner chosen by her parents and her own choice, Dave. In this novel, Marina's feelings for Dave make her have sexual relationships with him, contrary to Indian rules as she could not save herself for a man she did not know anything about. However, she reprimands him as if he was really a friend he would not have taken advantage of her. Thus her inner battle produces tensions and continuous quarrels with the people around her. Thus gender conflict is represented in discourse through the repetition of key words; a mechanism that will be used repeatedly by the author:

‘That’s all you think about, sex, sex and sex. Does our friendship not mean anything? Does it mean nothing to you? Does it mean nothing to you that this, this, what we are doing here may screw up my relationship with my husband-to-be? If you were a friend you wouldn’t have taken advantage of me. There was obviously something upsetting me and you, you stick your lollipop in my mouth.’

(*Ch or Ch 2000:73*)

Thus, on the one hand, she feels the need to do as she feels but on the other her family is always present in her mind. Thus, contrary to her parents' expectation that she became a doctor, or a lawyer, she turns out to be Indian's first female porn star to her husband-to-be's disappointment. Her doubts make her tell him about her situation but but in small pieces information spread over a long period of time like waiting for the moment she feels ready to talk about it. The more they know about each other the closer they become; Dave even develops feelings of worry and guilt he had not felt before.

Saris and Sins (2003) presents the love triangle love relationship among Kareena-Cloey-Samir, the latter being defined as “a bogus boyfriend to Cloey and a hoax of a husband to Kareena”(S and S 2003: 20), on the one hand and Jordan and Zara on the other. Being the victims of another arranged marriage as in the previous novel and Samir’s twofold infidelity.

In Rome you must do as the Romans do, but in England, Indians do as the Indians do. And Indians have arranged marriages, and that means no hanky panky before wedlock. And that even includes blowing kisses.

(S and S 2003: 13)

From the beginning Samir is in a continuous struggle with himself in order to confront his wife, his lover and his parents,

The question was: could he be unfaithful to Cloey? They’d been together for six fantastic years, he couldn’t waste what they had for just one night of passion with his wife, could he?

(S and S 2003: 15)

What seemed to be a good marriage characterised by the husband’s honesty towards his wife and the break with the Indian prejudices regarding the body turns into one more nightmare full of lies, unfaithfulness and false appearances.

When she finds out about her husband’s infidelity Kareena’s option is to take action rather than ignore it (breaking an Indian rule) contrary to the passive role played by Indian women and contrary to her mother’s frivolity when she finds out about Samir’s infidelity, “Do we have to find you another husband?” (S and S 2003: 405), a passage that shows the frivolity of gender roles and the lack of care for the daughter’s suffering. And Samir’s wall, the one he had built on lies and deceit, was about to come tumbling down. Samir’s self-defence strategy is to cover his lies with more lies. In one of his interventions, he spoke with a voice heavy with anger,

You have hurt my feelings, Kareena, I can't believe you think that I have been with a white woman. It's really low of you to think that of me.' He pointed to a picture of his grandparents. Two old-timers looking petrified by the flashbulb. 'Do you honestly think that I am a freeloader? Do you think that I could let your ancestors toil and grind the ground to dust, to pave the way for our future, so that our parents could come to England and live a better life and then for me to wreck it all with my selfishness.

(*S and S* 2003: 396)

This passage tackles the issues of lack of trust in the couple, a position against cultural and racial mixture and the perpetuation of tradition through the generations first in India as a responsibility assigned to the older generations, and later in England in the hands of the first generation. It also tackles the issue of selfishness, which does not match the idea of the Indian community due to its link with the Western idea of individuality. Samir not only defended himself from the accusations with more lies but also with the reference to issues of great importance for any member of his community that could hurt anyone's feelings and bring them onto his side. Besides, as he is a Sikh he is not supposed to have this type of relationship outside his religion. It is not just race in this case, it would not be approved of if the girl was Hindu.

After two years in prison he, Jordan, lost Cloey, his girl, a clever and astute girl who is resigned to losing her "last property" (*S and S* 2003: 143) and who does not mind telling one lie after another to get what she wants with both Samir and Jordan. Their relationship is rounded off by Aileen, Cloey's mother, and Jordan's, an ex boyfriend, love-hate relationship. Despite the blood relation between Cloey and her mother, Jordan was outside the *control* she imposed on her own daughter while she displayed an ambiguous feeling of hatred and envy for Jordan. Jordan says to Cloey's mother,

[...] can't decide where I'm going to fuck her first. I want to make it special for her, you know, especially as it's her first time. Really special. (...) I'm going to have so much fun with your virgin Cloey. And there will be nothing you can do, do you understand, Turnip Picker? ' (*S and S* 2003:180)

He also makes her realise that she will lose her daughter if she keeps on treating her the way she does. Facing Aileen with his eyes glinting madly,

‘You gave birth to Cloey, Aileen, you didn’t just find her on a rubbish bin. If you carry on treating her this way, she’s going to end up hating you.’ He leaned in closer. ‘The way you’re going, the only way she’ll escape you will be through your death. Could you honestly rest in peace knowing that? Knowing that your daughter was secretly pleased at your funeral?’

(*S and S* 2003: 294)

As to his relationship with Cloey, she “was his woman, lying *to* her was going to be hard, but it wouldn’t stop him lying *on* her. “ (*S and S* 2003: 49). In their first confrontation regarding Kareena

‘Have you slept with her yet? Your wife.’

‘No.’ such a direct and short answer implies he is lying. She had no need to think about it before answering.

‘Liar! You (increases the feeling of guilt with the use pronoun with a direct and pejorative effect on the listener) liar! Her words were Stara and filled with envy. No doubt his wife was beautiful, young, intelligent. And Indian.

(...)’ And [last of the enumeration of points she had to reprimand him on] you just had to marry her, didn’t you? You couldn’t let your family down, could you?’

(*S and S* 2003: 53)

Not being enough of a man to face his parents and marry the woman he loved for the Indian heritages sake, her hope of him not marrying Kareena had faded. Cloey wondered if she was “just Samir’s spare? The stunt double for his wife? (*S and S* 2003: 97) and planned to sleep with him and break his relationship with Kareena.

Looking for advice from Gilbert but paradoxically unable to listen, he suffers the consequences of his actions and has the difficult problem to get rid of his Indian wife without feeling a bastard. As Gilbert states,

‘I already gave you my advice months ago, and you didn’t listen. And now poor Cloey is suffering because of you.’ (⋯) What did she call you again when she found out?’

‘Er⋯a sick Sikh.’

‘Well, you are a sick Sikh.’

(*S and S* 2003:115)

In this conversation, of which I have only included a section, he is deemed a coward in a comparison to Edward VIII who contrary to Samir was capable of abdicating his throne for love. His friend’s attempt to convince himself is shown in the transmission of a very direct message according to which he should

Forget your parents, forget your wife, think about your future happiness.

‘Another step. ‘Stop being a wishy washy wimpy wankey wimp.

Fuck, Samir, I’m serious. Stop wombling the ladder.

(*S and S* 2003: 117)

A different perspective is offered by Thomas Harding, in *Pand P* (2004), wrote diaries about his future; he “wanted to *be the achiever*. The achiever of his dreams.” (*P and P* 2004: 25) Being defined as a

[...] rare species of man. No matter how pretty the woman, how flirteous, how perfect, he would never succumb to an affair.

(*P and P* 2004:37)

his relationship with Nicole was

[...] a meeting of two worlds, a collision of two social breeds. Thomas always climbing the ladder that Nicole’s father thought he owned.

(*P and P* 2004: 94)

Their relationship is bound to fail in spite of the time together and Thomas’ meeting and acquaintance with an Indian woman develops. Despite their belonging to the same high social class, the means for the achievement of this position is of a diverse nature.

Therefore, while Thomas' social recognition and economic status responded to his own effort and hard work, Nicole and her father' s aspirations and position in the social ladder were fake. Added to this Thomas' hatred for marriage is not only shown in his refusal to marry Nicole but also in his infantile manner and lack of respect shown in the wedding speech of one of the marriage ceremonies celebrated in the hotel and which is counterbalanced by Nicole's,

All I'm trying to say is how lucky Phil and Tracy are to have found each other. Man and wife. They can now be free and not weighed down by constraints (...) `Weighed down by Tracy's belly, more like, ' said a voice.

(*P and P* 2004:77)

This quote stands as an instance of how discourse can be interpreted and modified according to different communities and sets of values and on how not all marriages are the result of two people falling in love but for unexpected reasons that contradict a established system.

In *Bindis and Brides* (2005), Nisha Minhas introduces Joel Winters, a climber, and a "love-making expert" (*B and B* 2005: 2) who begins by trying to seduce a new girl by cooking Indian food. In order to do so he asks the first Indian woman in the supermarket for help. What seems insignificant in the beginning becomes the *raison-d'être* of the novel. It will be Joel in whom Zarleena will find her strongest support and who will help her to get rid of her threatening husband, Armin.

The story develops around some main poles, Joel's unconditional help to Zarleena and the weaving of complex relationships among the characters as a result of the supposed love felt by Joel for Candy and her discovery of his continual unfaithfulness; the attitude of Joel's sister (a girl who is able to tell any lie in order to keep the economic benefits of being with her brother) adds one more trouble to the nonexistent relationship with his brother Dylan. Being an unstable and insecure man, Joel seems to depend on sex, in a similar way to Dave in *Chapatti or Chips* (2000), and climbing in order to achieve self-confidence without realising the high cost of it to both

his parents and Candy. He always justifies his behaviour, as an obsession with mortality and who climbs mountains to “escape the chains of conformity” (*B and B* 2005: 415), with the fact that “he was a man, with manly urges and manly needs” (*B and B* 2005: 22). His attempt to keep his sister out of his personal life proves futile and becomes a hard burden to carry. Therefore, being dependent on her brother and not developing a life of her own, she defines herself as the number one woman in her brother’s life although she realises she is losing ground due to the presence of so many women in his life; mainly Candy and Zarleena. As for Zarleena and Joel, she “was proving to be a major plus in his life” (*B and B* 2005: 75). The more support they give to each other, the closer they become. As a consequence, not only does it start to produce a sense of desire, attraction and psychological confrontation in Zarleena, but she also tries to create her self-defence strategies through the finding of her own answers and justification of the situation,

First hurdle, she was still married. Second hurdle, he was engaged. And the water jump, he might not even fancy her—or Indian women in general for that matter. Zarleena wondered about this for a moment. Maybe that was seeing the situation as a half-empty glass; wouldn’t it be better to view Joel as half full? She could only fantasize about being his girlfriend but she could still be his friend.

(*B and B* 2005:205)

When the plan is successfully accomplished Armin disappears from Zarleena’s life and Joel’s behaviour regarding her changes and becomes more distant. However it is to her that he tells about his feelings of regret and his failings. On his realization that he had hurt too many people by sleeping around, his regret leads to questions about his real feelings for Zarleena,

He asked himself, how would he feel if he never saw her again? How would he feel if he saw her with another man? (...) What if he’d been living in denial all along regarding his feelings for Zarleena? Is that why he’d helped her with Armin? Or would he have helped her anyway?

(*B and B* 2005: 475)

The relationship between Zarleena and Joel is also shaped by references to Indian prejudices and stereotypes. The passage below highlights one of the gender roles not accepted by tradition canon, the economic independence of Indian women, and which links to Joel's unawareness that Indian women are not expected to work and get by without a man's support. Similarly, the knowledge of culinary skills is one of the gender stereotypes challenged in the primary bibliography. As can be seen in the development of this thesis the lack of knowledge of Indian culture, the existing prejudices and expected modes of behaviour will not impede the final success of interracial relationships.

‘So...are you implying that my sister and I are stingy then?’

‘No, you're different. Different rules apply to you. Everyone knows Indians work seven days a week, fifty-three weeks a year. It's normal. It's in your blood. And to be honest, I would have felt a bit let down if I'd found you closed today. You must hold on to your culture. ‘he washed down his huge smile with a gulp of Red Bull. ‘Good stuff this. You're a very successful race of people. And fucking good cooks as well.’ Joel and Zarleena.

(*B and B* 2005: 52)

Despite some initial hesitation and Zarleena's unfortunate marriage she was eager to help Joel for love. The attraction for a man with qualities different to her husband, “love and caring for his woman (in a world “devoid of romance and love”) (*B and B* 2005: 5), “a man who was experiencing love” [cooking for a woman] (*B and B* 2005: 15), to gain her love, who “didn't camouflage his emotions in ego” develops in her a feeling of security and protection and a need to be loved by a man like him. As she states,

And every woman she knew wanted to feel safe. To be protected. Maybe Joel was the yang to Armin's yin.

(*B and B* 2005: 403)

Both Joel and Armin learnt their lesson. On the one hand, Joel realized ‘How sleeping around always leaves at least one person hurt.’ (*B and B* 2005: 474). The sensitivity provided by an Indian woman brings a new awakening to his life and Joel

leaves his past life as a womaniser and climber behind and starts his relationship with Zarleena; two things he wouldn't do for Clandy as it would have meant him giving up his goals and dreams. Similarly, Armin learned to respect others. It will be when Armin is unable to confront Joel who is defending Zarleena, Armin's wife; he learns to have respect for him.

In *The Marriage Market* (2006), given her refusal of an arranged marriage, Jeena, a columnist and agony aunt for an Asian newspaper, *Asian Delight*, turns not only against her *liberal* parents but also against one of the pillars of tradition. Refusing to be taken to India she prompts a friendship marriage with Aaron, an English white man with whom she had been caught in bed by her parents. Consequently, she becomes the first of our British-Asian born female characters who by running away and having self-defence achieves her aims in life before being forced into an arranged marriage, much to the dismay of her parents. Although her parents disown her because of her rebellious behaviour she is able to overcome this with Aaron's help and protection. As she maintains before her father,

I wish sometimes you could just forget all this traditional stuff and concentrate more on what really matters. How many Indian families do you know who have disowned a daughter for falling in love with the wrong colour or the wrong caste? Loads. Well, you're going to have to do the same with me because there is no way I'm splitting up with Aaron. I love him.

(*The MM* 2006: 149)

This quote offers a challenging discourse on interracial marriage defined in terms of love and a criticism of disownment as the main punishment after interracial marriages or the marriage between people from different castes. At the same time, this discourse challenges and redefines the parents-daughter relationship of power, even more after her decision to accept that she will be disowned if that means the triumph of love despite the weight of tradition.

On the eve of her secret marriage with Aaron she cannot but think about the marriage her parents had not dreamed about. It is unthinkable for an Indian woman to marry the wrong man, challenge her parents and for a mother to be absent from their daughter's big day. Consequently, not only is she punished and disowned by her family but also by her boss. According to some of the dispositions for a Sikh marriage, people not professing the Sikh faith cannot be joined in wedlock by the Anand Karaj ceremony and, while husband and wife roles are regarded as complementary (and despite erosion of certain Sikh values due to the proximity and influence of Hindu majority in India), men and women's equality is enshrined in the teachings of the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Thus, not only are they violating the Sikh conduct of conduct on marriage but independence will become their creed as a couple.

Shortly after her marriage to Aaron she meets Sam, and she contemplates the possibility to initiate a relationship with him, given her husband's frivolity and distance. At this point, and as considered in the following passage, she is not only transgressing the traditional Sikh on marriage but also the having an interracial marriage and contemplating of the possibility of being unfaithful. Due to this she is not a good role model. Here the narrator tackles some of the basic issues of Indian culture, not only the points included so far but also the idea of the community and women's purity, a presence or lack of it that, as reflected in the traditional discourse affects women more than men,

An Indian woman who cheats on her husband, even if the husband is white, is considered impure and low. From an Asian standpoint, if a woman is unfaithful, then not only is she mocking her husband, but she is also mocking the Asian culture (...) This type of woman is not a good role model; the last thing any parent wants is for their own daughters to see such acts go unpunished, to see the adultery is okay. And therefore the punishment is often severe.

(*The MM* 2006: 287)

The distance and frivolity of his feelings will develop into Aaron's fight for Jeena's happiness and her parents' forgiveness. In this process the friendship marriage

acquires a new light; little daily events such as the attraction some boys feel for her wife or the removal of the wedding ring from her finger, a symbol of freedom, followed by Jeena's kidnap so that she can learn the main doctrine on the *Guruth Grand Sahib* before being taken to India for an arranged marriage, precedes the birth of a love marriage.

From the moment Aaron commences his friendship marriage, or said in a different way, a marriage of convenience, with Jeena he counted the days to his divorce from Jeena, which was agreed to last for only a year. The change of his feelings for her from indifference to care, affection and love signifies a new beginning and her husband's jealousy grows after Jeena's new relationship with Sam.

Jeena's mind was opening up to other possibilities. Like sex with Sam. Like being with a man who gave her what she needed. Like knowing her man wasn't going to sleep with other women. Like...

(TMM 2006: 269)

Furthermore the possibility of having other attitudes towards men points to a new model of femininity that brings her closer to the Western way and more distant from the Indian canon. In the end Jeena's forgiveness is achieved in spite of her uncle's anchored Indian beliefs given the futility of his efforts and his niece's stubbornness to achieve her goals regardless of his opinion. It is during her kidnapping when one of the most significant passages on a harsh reality can be read and which specifies a code of action by the older generations that is never punished and subject to abolition. As the narrator shows,

Kidnapping is so common in India and Pakistan it's a wonder it isn't on the school curriculum. Yet, if a family has to resort to this ghastly deed to force through an arranged marriage, something must be decidedly rotten at the core of Asian values. And now this lowly practice has spilt over to the West.

(TMM 2006: 447)

Therefore, and however surprising it might seem, not only does Jeena seek a secret marriage to avoid being chained by Indian tradition, but the defenders of Indian values are willing to go the any lengths to strengthen their traditions, by importing the practice of kidnapping to England from India. It is not easy to believe that this could happen in a civilized society but the truth is that it still occurs beyond the Asian borders, and in spite of the recent modernising role of India as regards power, wealth, technology and what has been classified as Pan-Indianness (Varma 2006)⁵. Moreover, it is significant that the conflict of Eastern and Western values criticised as the source of evil and destruction on British-born Indian teenagers by the Indian traditionalists finds its most profound contradiction in an unbelievable practice that is even more destructive. Most important of all, Jeena knew that

[She] wasn't the only British-born Asian being held against her will in Britain in the name of family honour. Chances were that she was one of many. Like caged monkeys they wait to be set free, although, ironically, that very freedom is a misnomer for something far worse: a life sentence with a man you've never met before, your new husband. A man who you must obey. A man who, let's face it, owns you.

(TMM 2006: 447)

Freedom is not restricted to the Western concept of the individual's independence but as freedom from the strict family household and her position as the husband's property after marriage.

Between Jeena's kidnapping and Aaron's lack of knowledge of her whereabouts, Jeena's father's impossibility of communication with his daughter is disguised with a lie. To Aaron's lie that Jeena had left the house after an argument, Jeena's father responds,

⁵ Pavan K. Varma (2006). *Being Indian: Inside the real India*. Arrow Books: London. It was published under the title *Being Indian - The Truth About Why the 21st Century will be India's* in the States. It was translated into Spanish as *La India del siglo XXI* (2006) Barcelona: Ariel.

But you make sure that you don't let Indian women walk over you. You never back down to them. They are as stubborn as camels. Remember you are the man and she is your slave.

(TMM 2006: 445)

This passage links to the idea of submission and the idea of property highlighted above in an attempt to try and impose an aspect of Indian culture on a white man. It is after the completion of an interracial marriage that the members of the Indian family make him a member of their family, a part of it, and one of the steps for a good relationship is his initiation in the *Guru Granth Sahib* teachings as concerns the treatment of women.

At this point the gender discourse adopts a different light, Aaron is now regarded in terms of gender and not of race as had been the case until he makes Jeena's parents understand the true value of life to the detriment of culture and tradition as highlighted in this dissertation. Considered "a man who could turn their daughter against tradition" (TMM 2006: 65) and "the thief of Indian culture" (TMM 2006: 335) by Jeena's uncle, his struggle for Jeena's happiness locates him in a new relationship with her parents. The initial distant and disgraced relationship is converted into a warmer and more secure position, a member of the family. Given Aaron's ambition, dignity, protection and defence of Jeena,

He didn't wait for his parents to give him a head start in life, like many British-born Asian men did these days. He had soul and he had passion. What more could a father want for his precious, only daughter?

(TMM 2006: 281)

As his love for Jeena grows, his self-confidence increases and he is able to read a letter from his mother -a letter he had found impossible to read for fear in his teenage years and that tells him about the existence of a sister,

Learning of his mother's terrible guilt and her struggles to come to terms with losing her daughter to a family she knew nothing of. (TMM 2006: 419)

It is after the encounter with his sister that he can talk about their mother with naturalness, an issue which “had been hidden deep within himself” (*TMM* 2006: 438) for years, together with the “fear that if you get too close to something you’ll lose it” (*TMM* 2006: 443). It is also when he can confront the bullies from the Fletcher gang for the first time, a gang that made his childhood years hell with their physical and mental abuse. Furthermore, his behaviour towards Jeena and her father becomes more and more a relationship of freedom, fairness and justice which find their most exemplary expression, as has been indicated above, in the blossoming of love in spite of Aaron’s initial denial of his feelings for Jeena.

Aaron’s strength to confront the bullies of his childhood is closely related to Cory’s sense of guilt in *Tall, Dark and Handsome* (2007) regarding Jennica and the Saffron-Ryan nexus, and the battle between Cory’s self and his family. As for Jennica, he failed in his obligation to take her back to her twin sister after their parents died in a flood and the two sisters were left at an orphanage in Delhi. As regards the Saffron-Ryan nexus, he is caught between the acceptance of his love for a woman who loves him for what he is, his inability to speak the truth and the threat from Ryan, Saffron’s brother, who knows about Cory’s real whereabouts. The denial of his feelings for an Indian girl moves in the same direction as the other white male characters from Nisha’s previous works, as shown in this section. He is a figure like Dave (*Chapatti or Chips*) and Aaron (*The Marriage Market*). Like Dave he has lacked parental love. Like Aaron, he shows the female characters’ parents their wrong preconceptions that cause unhappiness and suffering and make their children’s wishes stronger than traditional values.

His desire for real life to be like a film in which “you could delete certain things and add better endings” (*TDH* 2007: 189) was different from his feelings with Saffron.

The more that Cory thought about her, the more he wanted her. There was something great about her quirky, happy and sincere attitude.

(*TDH* 2007: 189)

His relationship with Saffron is based on two pillars, dishonesty and their confrontation concerning Indian issues. In fact, Cory’s knowledge of India, of which

Saffron knows nothing of, drives to repression and an apparent victimization. It marks a difference between them and she cannot act in life without a defensive attitude when India is mentioned in a conversation, the same attitude that has led to break some friendship relationships,

How many friends had she lost because she overreacted, because of her defensive stance on all things Indian? The answer did not come easily. Perhaps, she'd told herself, she was the way she was because she had no real identity.

(TDH 2007: 87)

One of the most interesting passages appears with Saffron's suspicion of the distant relationship between Cory and his parents. It is when she demands an explanation that a key Indian issue comes to light as a sort of retaliation. Not only does he contradict one of his comments on Essex girls⁶ but he also makes her sense of guilt increase with the sort of behaviour that would not have been accepted if his parents were Indian no matter how lenient they had been:

Essex girls, lovely creatures, are so confident in their ability to pick a good partner that they don't waste any time in the bed department. Shag first then fall in love after. It's not that dissimilar to the arranged-marriage system really. Where they marry first and fall in love later.

(TDH 2007: 217)

In this case, and as derived from the quotation above, the Indian and the British characters are not as distant as is normally assumed. As to the former, that is Essex girls form their own group with their own norms and regulations.

While the traditional Indian discourse on sexuality demands that sexual relationships only take place after marriage and the choice of partner is in the parents' hands, in the new model of femininity the reverse occurs. Most of both, British-Asian women and Essex girls demand a personal freedom that has been denied them for a long

⁶ The term Essex girls refers to the stereotype of the way girls should dress, behave and act in order to become part of the canon and in order to be fashionable in Essex.

time. All this also points to a new sexual code, and with this, to a definition of a hybrid tradition. Nevertheless, just because she was branded an Essex girl (as far as sex before marriage is concerned) this does not imply the completion of the code. Being aware of her parents' rejection of her Essex girl behaviour and that in India she would not have had sex before marriage, her doubts arose from not knowing why she did so in London. The description of the Essex girl uniform shown below opposes a code of behaviour that would have been completely penalised in India and which points to a strict code of conduct,

High heeled stilettos, short skirts, tummy showing, revealing tops, Wonderbra, dyed hair and sleeping with a man on her first date. Her standards had dropped as quickly as her knickers had. India would have been so ashamed.

(TDH 2007: 217)

It is not until the finding of a newspaper sent by Ryan that Saffron is aware of Cory's real job. Only Cory's insistence on an explanation and Saffron's mother pushing her to read the letter sent by Ryan to know more about him. To Saffron's comment concerning her disbelief on Cory wanting her for sex "he can get that with his porn Star" (TDH 2007: 362), her mother responds with an ironical comment that is followed by an encouragement to read the letter.

I expect he only wanted you for some sort of trophy, Saff. I bet he's collecting different nationalities like some men collect model cars. Either that, or he was grooming you to appear in one of his...and she whispered, 'porn films. That's my take on the matter anyway.

(TDH 2007: 363)

It is after listening to him that she forgives him, meets her natural mother in India and realises that she definitely belongs to England. Nevertheless the finding of her natural parents, and as a consequence, the answer to her questions, gives her the peace of mind she had been searching for years which allows her to find her real self. During the

process of finding herself, Cory's relationship with his parents follows a parallel line. Cory's involvement in the porn industry ends up in his parents renunciation of him as a son due to his immoral way to earn a living and the shame on his family's name and his father's disappointment due to what they considered the destruction of the family honour,

His father had looked at him with disappointment, 'How could you have taken the family name of Roswell and linked it with this trash?

(TDH 2007: 47)

His mother' shows her preference for living humbly rather than losing the family honour. As she states,

How dare you? 'Rather live in a cave built with honest toil than a palace built by shame.'

(TDH 2007: 47)

Is it any different from Indian culture? His parents' proposals to sell his business for "shame that their son had chosen a path that only maggots crawl along" (TDH 2007: 361), is challenged after his parents recognise their failure to offer their son a better life. Their pride did not allow them see that their son was strong enough to earn a living of his own. As his father considers,

'The problem is us' (...) 'It's called pride. It was your mother's and my dream to give you a better life than the one you and your sister had. It was us who dreamed of getting you away from these flats one day. Never in our wildest dreams did we think it would be you who would be taking us away from here.

(TDH 2007: 387)

The strength to confront his parents brings the acceptance of their failure and the guilt for being unfair to their son. Contrary to his parents, he was able to lead a life without submission and without the economic limitations his ancestors had and that

allowed him establish an orphanage in India to help poor Indian children. Seeing how their son has succeeded in life changes their attitude and they finally realise that he has done something, although it is in a way that they would not have approved of, that makes them proud. As his mother states,

I've never said this before, but, now I think I understand you and what you do and, more importantly, why you do it, I can honestly say that I am very proud of you. And I've never said this before because I've been too damn stubborn to admit it, but I am extremely proud of the orphanage you have set up in India.

(TDH 2007: 389)

It is probably due to the lack of family and a girlfriends' affection that he encounters some recognition and care not only in his lifetime's career in the porn industry but also in his contribution to the orphanage.

In Aaron's case, with a lonely childhood after his parents died in a car accident, Aaron avoids coming close to a woman as it involves compromise. In this case, as in Dave's (*Chapatti or Chips* with a childhood without parents' love), Joel's (*Bindis and Brides* instable and insecure) and Cory's (*Tall, Dark and Handsome* rejected by his parents for his involvement in the porn industry) the circumstances around them lead to an unplanned and unimagined future; they will learn to love, protect and care for someone with no barriers imposed by either tradition or culture. Not only does it bring Aaron, Joel, and Dave to a common ground but also to the apparent impossibility of settling down. About Aaron in *The Marriage Market* (2006),

Never would he allow himself to become deeply involved with any of the women he'd slept with.

(*The MM* 2006: 233)

The quote above shows an example of how the circumstances shape personality and the acceptance of values transmitted from parents to their descendants.

4.2.4 *Trying to be different* (TMM 2006)

The search for a specific identity involves conflicting values with the individual himself. As we saw in section 2.2.6, identity is not only regarded from the individual point of view but also from the point of view of the community. It is then when questions like if the weight of tradition can restrain the individual from following his wishes and desires and if the moral values of the majority can limit the individual's freedom arise.

Any multicultural society yields what has been considered as the dialectics of identities (Hall 1992: 307) whose first actions are to contest the settled contours of national identity, and to expose its closures to the pressures of difference, otherness and cultural diversity. However, in a world whose boundaries are being gradually diluted such an approach falls into balancing criteria. The coherence and integrity of identity has developed into contradictory identities; a target of political interests and a concept linked to social duties.

In chapter 2 I highlighted that in both India and Britain, women do not want to be like their mothers. This area of conflict becomes meaningful as the same idea is shared by both a writer who lives and works in India like Manju Kapur and a writer who lives in England like B.K. Mahal (*TPG* 2004: 18) or any of the writers under analysis. Manju Kapur's second novel *AMW* begins as follows,

Astha was brought up properly, as benefits a woman, with large supplements of fear. One slip might find her alone, vulnerable and unprotected. The infinite ways in which she could be harmed were not specified, but Astha absorbed them through her skin, and ever after was drawn to the safe and secure.

(*AMW* 2003: 1).

Thus, the novel frames the life and experiences of British-Asian women. The desire for his daughter not to be like himself dissatisfied and wasted shows his desire for her to find a job as "with a job comes independence" (*AMW* 2003: 4) contrary to her mother's attitude who wants her to get married. "At the age of 16 she was well trained

on a diet of mushy novels and thoughts of marriage “(AMW 2003: 8) which involves greater control on them. As regards Astha’s father his defence of the job-independence nexus in India is tied to personal development. Conversely, in Britain it stands as a defence of the freedom of the self contrary transgressing traditional gender roles. Regarding the mother’s opinion, with the words *mushy novels* the author brings into play some of the stereotypes assigned to women and through an informal word, mushy, in particular, used to refer to food with no particular taste or that has been cooked for too long, the writer is consciously criticising the old principles of tradition. Therefore women have been traditionally and socially associated with being sensitive and delicate, in contraposition to men. It is an age, between 13 and 16, in which the girls are shy, obedient and unformed so it is easier to train them in a particular way. It is an age in which

[The] man had no fear that he would have to contend with a mature personality on a basis of sexual equality. Early marriage has also been conducive to high fertility, which the necessity for giving birth to sons directly encourages (Lannoy 1971: 103-104).

The author also shows the possibility of a *successful* marriage between a Muslim girl (Pipee) and a Hindu boy (Ajaz) in order to satisfy the older generations. However, this decision is not free from the sense of confusion regarding racial and ethnic identity:

Pipee “I can PRETEND to be a Hindu if you wish”

Ajaz “I wouldn’t dream of it, why should you? You are not a pariah, after all.

(AMW 2003: 128)

It depends on something more than appearance; full of examples of dislocation and cultural denigration leading to an erosion of identity. The characters are in a continuous struggle to find out about their real identity where no easy real split can be made between East-West combination. They need to justify themselves as they do not belong to the dominant classes.

4.2.4.1 *Hall, Crane, Hutnik and the Indian community*

In section 2.2.6.1, I considered Hall's conception of identity, the polarity between community and national identities as well as the prejudices among the members of the minority culture. The passage below, like others mentioned in this thesis, points to the continuous reception of two opposed messages for which the existence of an accepted answer becomes opaque. On Kiran's, a young traditional and radical defender of the Indian way, sister's involvement with a white man, the threats to abandon her are constant and bring to the fore culture dichotomies, represented in this case by one of Kiran's friends,

Why don't you stick to your own women? Our culture doesn't mix with yours. We don't treat our women with disrespect. We don't go round having affairs, we don't hit them, we don't leave them to bring our children up on their own and we fucking don't divorce them when we're sick of them. And the nervy voice trailed off, angrily, to be replaced by Kiran.

(Ch or Ch 2000: 189)

So while the female characters try to enforce their British identity the complexity of a dual reality is strengthened by characters that regardless of their birthplace and age are deeply rooted in old Indian conceptions. Such an insistence on their community may respond to the desire to maintain it on behalf of the Indian way per se as an entity which is not swallowed by external phenomena and which has already been discussed in section 1.1. The desire to keep their community intact also reinforces the differences with the host society. In this vein, Stuart Hall (1987: 46) argues that,

It may be true that the self is always, in a sense, a fiction, just as the kinds of 'clousures' which are required to create communities of identification –nation, ethnic group, families, sexualities, etc. –are arbitrary clousures; [...] I believe it is an immensely important gain when one recognizes that all identity is constructed across difference and begins to live with the politics of difference.

The discourse on the impossibility of cultures mixing defended by Kiran's friends opposes the reality in later books through the existence of affairs in *Saris and Sins* (2003), physical mistreatment in *Bindis and Brides* (2005) or children left in adoption after a rape as in *Tall, Dark and Handsome* (2007).

The transmission of the code of tradition is not only Kiran's case but also of Jeena's uncle, as has been maintained above, and the boss, Mr. Akhtar. While Jeena's uncle is a defender of his culture and community from within the family, Mr. Akhtar is an outsider who takes Jeena's rebellion and marriage of convenience as a personal affront. Not only does he restrict her working benefits but he also removes her from her position as an agony aunt "on the grounds that she wasn't fit to hand out quality advice when the whole Asian community knew that her parents had disowned her" (*TMM 2006: 226-227*),

It was almost a foregone conclusion that when an Indian/Asian girl/woman goes against the Indian way, she would be punished, sometimes heavily, by the whole Asian community. Individualism is discouraged; thinking out of the context of the Indian traditions is frowned upon. In fact, by and large, if one truly turned the microscope on an Indian community one would find that on the Petri dish lay a mass of bleating sheep, with the odd black sheep being chastised for trying to be different. Being different can get you into a lot of trouble if you're Indian.

(*TMM 2006: 227*)

It is in this context that Jeena becomes the victim of another unwritten law regarding the control over the younger generations by the older one,

What was it with Indian elders and their lectures? What gave them the right to pass judgement on someone just because she was Indian? It seemed to be an unwritten rule that any Indian elder had the right to put their two pennies worth into a younger Indian's life?

(*TMM 2006: 229*)

Nevertheless, punishment does not only fall on Jeena but also on Aaron through the cancellation of the club membership by a long list of Indian and Pakistani people. Consequently it becomes apparent to Aaron that

The Asian community was a multi-headed beast. Its eyes and ears were everywhere and its tentacles searched far and wide. First there were problems with Jeena's parents and family. Next came problems at her work. Now, he himself could feel the whip of a loose tentacle with these cancellations.

(TMM 2006: 242)

The metaphor that compares the Asian community with a multiheaded beast strengthens the sense of community and the dependence on each member of the group to overcome any adversary situation on behalf of tradition and the collective consequences even in cases affecting either an individual or a family. Furthermore the violation of the Indian rules does not allow any freedom from punishment regarding the originators of such acts.

While British national identity was conceived as a community of communities in Parek's work (2000), as discussed in Chapter 2, this diversity is far from the concept of Indian national identity. Therefore, such identity definition does not give to any choice other than Indians forming an enclosed system as as portrayed, as a mode of example, in *The Marriage Market* (2006), Gurjinder, Jeena's uncle,

[...] prided himself on his national identity. Born in India, he lived in India and thought like an Indian.

(TMM 2006: 183)

Being an Indian who defended India and its culture throughout countries and generations, he,

[...] judged that moving to England was commendable, risky, brave. But not for him. And home has to be India. Born to die there.

(TMM 2006: 184)

He approves of his niece's disownment and later disapproves of his brother's forgiveness of Jeena after Aaron's conversation about Jeena's happiness with her father. According to Gurjinder only through punishment will she learn about the good ways and manners. As he states,

She must be punished, brother, for without punishment she will never learn true respect.

(TMM 2006: 187)

Consequently, Jeena's forgiveness unsettles the relationship between the two brothers. To Gurjinder, Jeena's uncle, not only had his brother become weak, "his strength stolen by a British Empire with no morals" (TMM 2006: 335) but his niece "had lost all respect for Indian values, running wild and mocking her traditional upbringing." (TMM 2006: 335). As a result the power hierarchy is modified and Gurjinder's defence of his national Indian identity which categorises Crane's argument on the conflictive nature of the association of the lack of power with the individuals' need to assert their identity.

Also with a childhood caught between two cultures, Meena in *A Married Woman* (1996) cannot find a place for herself. It is here that Tofantsuk (2007: 93) defends the physical and symbolic value of the fence outside the Kumars' house; it is only Meena who can see the two sides of the fence but cannot find a place of her own between the Indian and the English territory,

Whenever we went `out', out meaning wherever English people were, as opposed to Indian friends' houses which in any case was always `in' as all we would do was sit in each others' lounges, eat each others' food and watch each others' televisions, my parents always wore their smartest clothes.

(AM 1996: 25)

outside the symbolic borders of their culture, the parents put on a performative, mimicking self (Tofantsuk 2007: 96).

Her initial desired attachment to Britishness is framed by different factors. First and foremost, hybridity is prone to disturb and weaken rather than facilitate the counter-discursive potential of the self (Schoene-Harwood 1999:160). As a consequence and as an illustration of the author's words, she is unable to achieve a balancing act between the two cultural and social lores, which she presents as exclusive. Conversely, hybridity is seen as positive by other critics, as "a positive space, a space of crucial negotiation and significant potential development in the contemporary world. Hybridity is the fusion of elements, but not a melting pot that melts away the differences" (Tofantsuk 2007: 145).

In her need for social acceptance, she articulates the need to develop a secure form of group-identity (Branach-Kallas 2004: 147) that makes her realise that

The gap between what is said and what is thought, what is stated and what is implied, is a place in which I have always found myself. I'm really not a liar. I just learned very early on that those of us deprived of history sometimes need to turn to mythology to feel complete, to belong.

(AM 1996: 10)

On the Western side, which dominates the beginning of the narrative, she adopts a Western pattern of behaviour insulting adults, shoplifting or talking about boys and sex, misses getting Christmas presents as do her friends, she feels hurt for the inexistence of Indian people on television and even rejects her body as it does not suit the required Western canon. Wondering whether boys would ever notice her the way they always noticed Anita and trying to find an answer, she wrote to Cathy and Claire column in the *Jackie* magazine. The beginning was as follows

Dear Cathy and Claire, I am brown, although I do not wear thick glasses. Will this stop me getting a guy?

(AM 1996:145)

The answer she received from the magazine ended with 'BE YOURSELF' (AM 1996: 146). Anita's discourse stems from both the Indian crisis being the only Indian family in

the neighbourhood and the prejudices on race, the complexities of culture clash and the model of a desired woman as to physical appearance.

Her initial desire to be accepted as a member of the host community will turn into an unexpected desire to know and understand the Indian cultural heritage she had once rejected through the impact of Namina's visit and the discovery that there are other realities common to all human beings that do not depend on culture. Namina, "the embodiment of the lost culture" (Tofantsuk 2007: 102) and a teacher and maintainer of her culture throughout the year spent in Britain, teaches her the difference between space and culture value and the importance of the preservation of the latter. This, together with some friendship disappointments, the experience of racism and the false interpretation of Indian history at school produces a sense of greater dislocation and the necessity to create a strong sense of self with which to reassure herself. The fake and manipulative vision of India takes an authenticity with her grandmother's real knowledge and awakens a curiosity never experienced before.

It was all falling into place now, why I felt this continual compulsion to fabricate, this ever-present desire to be someone else in some other place far from Tollington. Before Nanima arrived, this urge to reinvent myself, I could now see, was driven purely by shame, the shame I felt when we `did` India at school.

(AM 1996: 211)

In an interview, Meera Syal stated that

This is not just a British-Asian story," said Syal, in a break between scenes. "This is a family story, and one about a passionate friendship that goes wrong. It's about finding out where you are, and where your loyalties lie. Those are issues that affect everybody. (*The telegraph* 2002: while filming AM).

She continued,

I think [referring to *Anita and me* film] we'll see a change in the stories people want to see-stories about our frailty as human beings, our sense of identity, where our roots really are. We're in an increasingly shrinking world, made up of nations of

people who come from everywhere. Anita and me isn't just a British-Asian story: this is a story about all of us, and how we adapt. (*The Telegraph* 2002)

In Meera Syal's second novel, *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (1999) Tania started by playing Asian roles to open and broaden her professional career fully aware of the taste for the different by the British population. Once she becomes famous she refuses to do any more Asian stories and intends to become part of the British mainstream. Her idea of the mainstream is not linked to the Indian race but to her condition as an artist, a condition which is not attached to the Indian idea of *being a part of something else*. As she says in a conversation with Mark:

No more grubbing in the ghetto, I'm mainstream now. (…)

The ghetto got you where you are today, Tania. It's what makes you different. And a good story is a mainstream story, end of story.

Tania stood up defiantly. Why does everything I do have to come back to me? People like me? My family? My background? Our dirty linen? I'm an artist, not a bloody social worker. (...)

Does being Jewish inform your every daily activity? Do you wake up, check you're still circumcised and hum "Hava H Nagila" all the way to the office?

(Mark) "I know who I am, so I've got nothing to prove. Bloody hell, I'd have never started this conversation if I'd known you were going to be so defensive.

(*LHH* 1999: 258)

This extract stands a relevant example of the construction of gender identities and the way the assurance of what you are shapes your identity differently from someone who cannot take that certainty for sure. Tania cannot think about her identity without identifying it with the task of a social worker. Therefore, in this case, as in many others mentioned in our analysis, social power and prestige prevails over race and gender, contrary to *Passion and Poppadoms* (2004) by Nisha Minhas. She did not consider herself a social worker but an artist and she could not really understand why everything had to go back to her, people like her, her family, her background. However, as Mark states,

You can't separate what you're good at from what you are. But you can use it to get into a position of power and take it from there. First, you've got to know your voice, and then you've got to like it. Get it?

(LHH 1999: 259)

She finds herself between two traditions and two people, Mark in his attempt to obtain the best from her although she cannot become mainstream and envied by Martin who cannot write any work of quality.

In a complex society like the British the recognition of the success of the Asian community is not acceptable in some sections of the white community. Naina's brother threatens Dave to keep away from his sister, words uttered by one of Kiran's friends:

You white people call us Pakis, yet you try to steal our women. You hate us, but you needed us when we came from India to do your dirty work. But we are a success and you show your jealousy through your ignorance.' He spat in Dave's face. `And now you want us out. You have no honour, no pride, no family values'.

(Ch or Ch 2000: 89)

This is linked to the concept of place and time outlined in chapter 2, as to the hardships suffered by the members of the first generation on their arrival in England in search for better life prospects. The concept of ignorance is also attached to the countless number of prejudices and stereotypes concerning the Asian community, together with racism. It was after this that Dave thought about Naina's correct behaviour, "Indian men did not want their women straying" (Ch or Ch 2000: 195).

Hutnik's dissociative strategy (2.2.6.3), where categorization is in terms of ethnic minority group membership and not in terms of the majority group membership, would be represented in the micro-context of the Indian household as categorization is carried out in terms of the minority group and not of the dominant one. Mrs. Chowdrey's words in her native tongue, Hindi concerning proper conduct for a young Indian girl and the association

of immorality with the nation, India, stands as an example of this strategy in the metaphor to define Zarleena,

You have beautiful skin, Zarleena, as pretty as the sun. Have you ever seen how ugly skin burnt by boiling ghee becomes? Suddenly a perfect princess becomes a disfigured untouchable. She lowered her voice to a whispering hiss, `You could have pulled away when that Englishman kissed you. But you stayed there and shamed all of India. You let this man caress our motherland with his sly lips. A kiss on you is a kiss on us, Zarleena, now go and wash him off your body.` Mrs. Chowdrey let a thin smile climb onto her mouth. `I know you are young and find it hard to keep to the right path, but kissing men, especially the white man, is virtually irredeemable. I suggest you go to the temple this Sunday and pray for some forgiveness.

(*B and B* 2005:164)

After reprimanding her, Mrs Chowdrey shows some sympathy with the use of *I know you are young*; with the function to accommodate to the conversational style of the other. She also accommodates to the listener and shows her sympathy with the verb *suggest* rather than any form expressing obligation that would have worsened its effect. *British-Asian* women are not expected to be prone to seduction, and if they are, they are expected not to give in to temptation. Thus, the quotation above stands as an example of the *supposed* preservation of virtue, the latter seen as “a relationship of domination, a relationship of mastery” (Foucault 1998: 70). As indicated by R. Lannoy (1971: 113), any visitor to India notices “a puritanical social life with a taboo on overt expression of tenderness between young people, and sentimental movie romances in which kissing is prohibited”.

As regards the assimilative strategy, where self-categorization primarily emphasizes the majority group dimension and denies ethnic minority roots, as would be the case of the main female character in *Bindis and Brides* in which Zarleena reacts according to the Western code of conduct and not the Indian one, in spite of its interpretation as bad conduct and a shame on the community.

In the marginal strategy, where neither dimension is important or salient to self-categorization, the conscious decision not to choose an ethnic identity or a majority group identity can be traced in:

She always used these monthly visits to take stock of her life. In here, her Indianness was brought home to her. It felt secure to be part of a community where looking out for each other took precedence over most things. In this one room, at least four generations of Sikh heritage were laid out on one huge floor, in a foreign land. It could make you proud. It did make you proud. It was like a mirror, forcing you to look at yourself. And what stared back from the mirror to Naina was a coconut: brown on the outside, white on the inside. And she didn't want to be a coconut.

(*Ch or Ch* 2002: 285)

Thus, as is derived from this quotation and Indian culture, the sense of otherness affects the polarization between pure race and her hybrid identity and, as already mentioned in this dissertation, Indian culture does not accept the idea of individuality but of the community. Thus, I would like to highlight some of the characteristics that define it as such in the next section as shown in the literature under study.

4.2.4.2 *We Indian people (Ch or Ch 2000)*

First of all it is worth saying that according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimates of the population by ethnic group in England, published in January 2006, the Indians are the largest ethnic group. According to the 2001 census, it was the largest Asian or Asian British group, followed by the Pakistani, Bangladeshi and other Asian (in which the Punjabi would be included).

The title in itself implies opposition and difference as well as the strengthening of some cultural and social values to the detriment of others. In Chapter 2, I highlighted one of the characteristics of Indian society, the idea of the community and the difficulty of understanding the Western concept of individuality. Thus, in this line, in *Anita and Me*

(1996), Meena's discovery of Deidre's (their English neighbour and Anita's mother) fight for her family due to the difficulty she was having of being socially accepted in the neighbourhood, contrary to Meena's Indian family, contradicts some of the most widely known stereotypes on Indian families. Contrary to the existing misconceptions, they (Meena's Indian family)

Were not one of those faceless hordes depicted in the television news, arriving at airports with baggage and children, lost and already defeated, begging for sanctuary. 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 in supermarket queues whilst they tried to make sense of their small change or the gesticulating wanderers who would sometimes stop my papa for directions holding up pieces of paper with 'Mr Singh, Wolverhampton, England' written on them.

(AM 1996: 216)

The TV image of the Indians did not match reality of being a competent and strong group that could survive by its own means; the natural reception of approval and acceptance made life more natural and lacking in artifice. Such naturalness always opposed Deidre's situation, Anita's mother, who despite Britain being her birthplace never received the acceptance she needed and she was always craving for. Conversely, Anita's mother's effort to be accepted as part of her neighbourhood did not prove successful and her lack of approval led her into a process of rejection of what was considered a threat, the acceptance of an Indian family. She saw her acceptance threatened by someone foreign and wondered how life could be so unfair, when it was really her own fault and her sense of failure that hardened her image before the English themselves.

As has been observed in this study, the female characters' struggle to be themselves as British citizens is not separated from the presence of the Indian community that reminds them of what they think they are or of their conduct. This serves as the portrayal of the community's consciousness of their difference and their attempt for social acceptance. Similarly to the immigrant situation from the 50s who could "seldom make

interpersonal contact outside the group without the knowledge of its other members” (Desai 1963: 1234), British- born Asians are not always permitted freedom of action in the choice of their friends and conduct. As a consequence, “discipline is imposed through social and religious institutions with greater authority than that of parents” (Lannoy 1971: 110). On being told off by a neighbour for playing and shouting near her house given his wife’s illness, nothing could be more insulting than being reprimanded by a white person,

But to be told off by a white person, especially a neighbour, that was not just misbehaviour, that was letting down the whole Indian nation. It was continually drummed into me, ‘Don’t give them a chance to say we’re worse than they already think we are. You prove you are better. Always.’

(AM 1996: 45)

As has been indicated above, the role of the defender of the community is played by brothers, as in *Chapatti or Chips* (2000) and in others by uncles as in *The Marriage Market* (2006), as two modes of example. One of the most significant approaches to the issue is provided by Kiran, Naina’s eighteen-year-old brother, a strict follower of the Indian rules and able to do anything necessary for his sister not to meet another man and to follow “the rigid path laid out by her Indian upbringing” (*Ch or Ch* 2000: 225) with the direct implication of the lack of place for Naina’s desires and choices. Despite this fact, the prohibition of the English and Indian cultures mixing does not justify the importance of one culture over the other. Thus, the discourse on the impossibility of cultures mixing is, once more, expressed on the good Indian ways and the everpresent accomplishment of gender expectations. Unlike the British-Asian female characters who challenge their gender expectations, and like the members of the first generation, Kiran, a member of the second generation, is a defender of the uprooting and preservation of Indian culture in Britain. For this reason, his discourse highlights, as indicated above, the superiority of one race over the other through a direct reference to a right conduct that should characterise the Indian community. As he maintains,

We Indian people live our lives by a very wholesome set of rules. We do not drink, we do not gamble, we do not have affairs and we do not have sex

outside marriage. We place our family before everything else. We look after our sisters, our mothers and fathers. We make sure that no one is an outsider and everyone pulls together as one strong unit. That's why we have no divorces, that's why we are successful, that's why we must protect our way of life and especially our women. (...) 'Especially we must marry within our own religion. We must keep our religion and our roots alive.'

(Ch or Ch 2000: 226)

A representation of social stereotypes beyond a reality attributed to the white community in full so as to bring into disrepute a community they cannot join or adapt and that yields a paradoxical feeling of refusal and envious hatred not to be able to live their own lives.

The apparent moral superiority of the Indian over the British culture does not justify or validate women's submission but brings into light some of the stereotypes of both groups. Therefore the most simplistic ways of portraying an ethnic group is through stereotypes, on which the English base their opinions about the Indians, which shows the lack of genuine contact between the two communities as well as the ignorance in the attempt to lump together all the Indians under the same set of rules, and consequently, not leaving a place for rules or codes of conduct other than their own.

In section 4.2.2.2, I already approached the issue of culture clash and it was mainly based on moral values and conduct, which are constantly criticised. Foucault observed with much truth that "an action is not only moral in itself, in its singularity; it is also moral in its circumstantial integration and by virtue of the place it occupies in a pattern of conduct" (Foucault 1987: 28).

Any critical reading of the instance above is fully aware of the fact that the reason for the apparent lack of divorces, as a mode of example, is not due to the union of the members of the family but causes hidden behind being, among others, the still existing harsh social and cultural pressures on women, the fear of a rebellious escape and the impossibility to provide a logical and sensitive answer to the gaps in the traditional Indian gender treatment and the consequences derived from it, which are studied in this thesis. As

Dave considers in a conversation with Naina's brother, the individual is not in the position to judge a culture for its own sake, mainly when this culture deprives human beings from the most basic and democratic rights,

You can't go round preaching to everyone else that the Indian system is better than everyone else's, with shit talk like that. Unless you can answer me simple: why do women have to do as they are told? Why are women allowed no choice? Why can it be so wrong for someone to be an individual and not one of your Indian cogs? Some of it makes good sense, but, honestly, some of it is utter bullshit.' And Dave nodded sagely.

(*Ch or Ch* 2000: 226)

This unfounded belief in culture causes the misbelief in the culpability of its members due to the fact that being an Indian man he is compelled to follow conduct and decorum and not to become subject to physical mistreatment as in Armin (*B and B* 2005: 353) towards his wife. Thus, Prem, Armin's cousin's reluctance to believe in his condition as a wife beater is due to failure after Armin's comment on a book written by a Muslim on how to beat one's wife without leaving giveaway marks. This lack of trust in a member of your community would be regarded as wrong conduct, both being member with the same flesh and blood. To Prem's astonishment, Armin justifies the physical abuse on his wife with a direct reference to tradition and God's existence. As he states,

I'm all for discipline if a woman misbehaves. It's the reason God made men stronger than women.

(*B and B* 2005: 252)

This passage runs parallel to Prem parents' emphasis on good behaviour and the individual's responsibility not to look down on their community,

We must be on our best behaviour at all times, treat this country as you would India, and make no mistakes (...) Today, one Indian wife beater; tomorrow, all Indians are wife beaters.

(*B and B* 2005: 253)

As can be observed, the idea of the sense of the community is defended throughout the books but it is also used strategically not to be accused of unacceptable behaviour punished by the community. This conception of the community is also reflected in love as

She would just have to forget all that nonsense about falling in love. Indians don't do that.

(*Ch or Ch* 2000: 39)

As an Indian girl, although she was English by birth, she was aware that she was not in a position to judge her Indian heritage,

Who was she to question it? She was Indian. All Indians married this way. It was a done deal from your first breath. In India, where you breathe Indian air, you know no different. In England, breathing English air, being an English born Asian, you know it is different; different watching life, love, freedom and never being allowed to join in.

(*Ch or Ch* 2000: 55)

The first generations's origins, roots and traditions are directly imposed on the younger generations in support of the idea that cultures do not mix. "You must never forget where you come from, your roots, your traditions" (*Ch or Ch* 2000: 86). These roots and traditions are taken to the extreme in a much later novel in time, *Passion and Poppadoms* (2004). Despite her opposition to Indian rules, Marina, a British Asian character, caught in an identity crisis like the other female characters in a hybrid culture, will do her best for a wealthy English man. In order to do so not only will she defy the code of human relationships but she will also rely on the wisdom of ancient India. Part of this wisdom defended that if after her grandmother died and her ashes had been thrown and spread in the waters of the Ganges River, she threw some of this water over the head of the man she wanted it would bring him to loving her too.

Leaks were everywhere. How could what happened in India eighteen years ago affect what was happening today in Fenworth? Marina explained about the butterflies' wings flapping in China, causing a hurricane in America.

Cause and effect. Yin and yang. Emily was more confused than ever. How on earth could Ganges water from India trap a man from England into loving you? It didn't make sense.

(*P and P* 2004: 145)

It is because of Emily's jealousy of Marina that the former initiates a process of finding excuses for Thomas' lack of interest in him, "Thomas was a snob, snobs don't go for Indians" (*P and P* 2004: 148).

A further complication is the conscious difficulty in the achievement of the aims in life because of the, sometimes, inferiority feeling. One of the secondary characters in *The Pocket Guide To Being An Indian Girl* (2004) feels herself to be a member of a minority group and limits her aims in life. Her thoughts come to the point that because there were no Indian astronauts before her, she will not be able to become one. On Kully and Pardeep's visit to Kully' parents' house, after the wedding, children were playing Scrabble and a small girl offered Sushi some chocolates. It is this girl's statement that reflects the vision of their race as a majority. In light of this, whereas for the English the Indians are as well as the Pakistanis and other ethnic groups constitute a minority, within the different communities in England the Indians are the most numerous as is also reflected in the 2001 census.

Dippy `Well, I hope I get to be an astronaut but I don't think an ethnic minority has been in space yet.'

'Ethnic majority,' I cried.

(*TPG* 2004: 212)

The point in the achievement of a better life would be as B. K. Mahal states,

I wouldn't want to belong. I think it would make me feel very one-dimensional. I don't think that your identity has to be fixed. You just have to accept that your own way of being British is different from somebody else's way of being British (B. K. Mahal, *The Telegraph* 07.07.2004)

4.2.4.3 *Is she classy enough for you?* (Pand P 2004)

At this point it is reasonable to take up one of the most controversial aspects and stereotypes in both the host and Indian culture, the difficulties of cultures mixing and the problems of classes clashing. However there is the question of the uniqueness of Indian culture. An undercurrent runs through the entire novel, in *Passion and Poppadoms* (2004) where the issue is dealt with in greater detail, with a clear message. For every yin there is also a yang, for every good there is also a bad and for every obstacle there is also a solution.

I would like to remark on the concept of stereotypes as the externalization of ignorance, the occultation of one's own failures, the protection of the roots in a context of threat, and the obligation to comply with a traditional moral code, continuing with the argument developed in the previous section. With this I do not intend to negate its application to the data provided in the previous sections but to defend the fact that these issues are reinforced in the field of the clash of classes even more. Thus Thomas Harding, a wealthy British male character, personifies a discourse of social impossibility with his conception that "classes should remain divided and never meet in the middle. How they were from different backgrounds" (*P and P* 2004: 180).

Why did he feel this way towards cultures mixing? He couldn't blame his parents for this one. Maybe life has proved that people of different races really get on like a house on fire –they are more likely to set each other's houses on fire. Wars, battles, death – all in the name of religion, culture, and the upkeep of what one party believe is 'the right way' but the other believes is 'the wrong way'. Trying to have a relationship with a woman of a different culture would be asking for trouble– there would be just too many obstacles –especially when Thomas was having enough trouble understanding women of his own culture.

(*P and P* 2004:181)

From the social and political point of view there is not only the coexistence of different communities, and as a result, of different social classes, but also the possibility

of changing things despite Thomas' initial reluctance. As he states in a conversation with Nathan,

Why rock the boat? They're brought up completely differently to us, their values are so old they're fossils. And what you and I might call backwards, they call culture. For two people of two different cultures to be a couple, something has to give.

(P and P 2004: 382)

This discourse on culture does not recognise Marina as a British-born individual but simply as Indian and with a different education and upbringing so the perception of British-Asian individuals as British has to be acknowledged by the white community.

In the shadows of the superficiality of her relationship with Nicole, his girlfriend, a blonde English girl from the same social status, and the process of rethinking his conceptions on culture mixing, he hides the acceptance of his love for Marina and the recognition that he finally called off his wedding with Nicole for the same reason subconsciously. Finding it difficult to accept and assume that an Indian woman, and not a white blonde woman as he thought in his childhood, was the only woman who changed him, it is a friend who has access to the assumption of his sentimental reality however morally incorrect in the Indian code,

What Marina and Thomas were doing now most definitely was not Indian. Two cultures mixing. It was a bad example. Just like the two biddies driving ahead. But, just like the two biddies driving ahead, it forced everyone to stop and see. Maybe, just maybe, mixing ain't that bad.

(P and P 2004: 440)

The idea of two cultures mixing contradicts one of the pillars of Indian culture as considered in Chapter 2. For the most traditional Indians, a caste is a group in which one is born and within which one must marry. Within each caste the individual has to behave in a particular way and the caste loss occurs in the case of marriage with a person from a different caste and violates the rules of that caste. As a consequence, the marriage

between two individuals from different castes, and even worse, from a different race and social class are clearly prohibited and punished, something difficult to assimilate and to explain. While Thomas was getting married to a woman from a different ethnic and social class, Marina was accepting, and with this, challenging the India's refusal to interracial marriage. Being aware of the transgression of their gender expectations they become the voice through which to express that other relationships are possible. Rather than being driven by prejudices and stereotypes, it is time for people from the two communities to develop and spread their knowledge of the world on a different scale. With this the objective is not to regard culture mixing as a bad example, as indicated above, but as part of normality with people in a daily coexistence and modify the traditional code of conduct. The difficulty in the acceptance of interracial marriages by the older generations is represented with a metaphor that links music and the hope for a future convivial to mixed marriages.

Marina tapped her feet together in time to "Mundian To Back Ke" by Panjabi MC. A piece of music that crossed two cultures. English and Indian. Why couldn't people be as harmonious as music? Why all the barriers?

(*P and P* 2004: 293)

This metaphor finds its parallel in contemporary British society on the publication of the first book on Bhangra music *Bhangra: Birmingham and Beyond*, presented on the exhibition *From Soho Road to the Punjab*, in September 2007. In the presentation of the book a panel could be read with a similar message,

We all live under the same sky,
The same moon, so let's dance
To the same old tune.

DCS- 'Rule Britannia' (*AIM*, 17.09.2007)

The British Asian characters are trying to represent in music what they are trying to achieve on a social scale and trying to ease interracial human relationships. Sharing the same context, experiences and troubles, the discourse on the social and cultural problems

stemming from culture duality is far from understanding by the Indian community. Even a metaphor on science tries to explain the impossibility of cultures mixing, although the attempts will prove futile in the end with the triumph of a relationship tied to love and not social expectations,

When two liquids cannot mix they are said to be immiscible. When two solids cannot mix, they are said to be immutable. But when two people do not mix they are said to be incompatible. Surely a white-skinned man couldn't mix with a brown-skinned woman. The chemistry, surely, wouldn't be there. There would be no compatibility.

(*P and P* 2004: 245)

This section leads us to one of the pillars of Indian culture, marriage, one of the most important ceremonies in life, and its dissolution.

Until now Nisha Minhas has only concentrated on the complex gender and culture relationships between the Indians and the white community. Nevertheless a timid attempt can be identified as regards the tense coexistence among different ethnic groups in England in one of the novels. The tense disputes between the Indians and Pakistanis are well known to the general public, mainly for historical reasons that are not target of this study. Despite this fact, and as a mode of example, it is worth noting that one objective of Aaron's in *The Marriage Market* (2006). His marriage of convenience with Saffron develops into a deeper knowledge of Indian culture and a stronger defence and protection of her. His concerns about the lack of justification of the the Indian way mingles with his determination to face it, conscious as he was of the significance of a peaceful existence. As a mode of example, one of the objectives of the Paper Lantern Martial Arts centre was to bring Indian and Pakistani lads together. This issue leads to one more step in the portrayal of the different realities of the British-Asian group in Britain and the writer's attempt to make it known to the reader, difficult as the task of reconciliation is in the hands of a member of the white community who does not understand of ethnic barriers.

4.2.5 Man and wife, all official (*LHH* 1999)

In the traditional Indian process it is the parents who choose their descendants' couple as well as the day of the first encounter. As the writer Sathnam Sanghera⁷ maintains in an interview for *AIM*,

[...] and because your 'date' has been chosen by someone else, and because so many British Asians are (like me), for want of a better word, schizophrenic, constantly switching between personas to fit into different worlds, you have absolutely no idea what end of the Punjabi spectrum they are coming from, and whether they mean what they say (*AIM* 18.09.2008).

Along the way daughters are given to their husband by the parents, destined to follow her husband's lead in life and as such, she adopts the role of a temporal visitor in the parents' household with a partially undefined future. This transience is observed in Chila's father metaphorical words on her way to the altar,

`Hai, they are lent to us for a short while and then we have to hand them over to strangers like...'

`Bus tickets?

`Hah! But then where does the journey end, hah?

`Hah! Yes. Only God knows, as he is the driver.

(*LHH* 1999: 15)

These words sow an unknown future in the hands of God but where eventually the individual's actions and decisions define fate. In Chila's case, the gradual failure in her marriage makes her contemplate other possibilities and initiate a new life of independence since the birth of her baby. Not worrying about the baby's sex, she feels the satisfaction that it is the first thing which is hers. As regards her separation, she considers independence is neither good nor bad, simply different as for the first time in her life she can make her own decisions and she becomes a new woman.

⁷ He is a new young writer born to Punjabi parents in the West Midlands; his first book is *If you don't know me by now* (2008).

The reader cannot forget that to a Hindu or Sikh marriage is a solemn religious duty that cannot be violated. Before God, the male and the female form together the perfect human being. Therefore, neither can worship apart from the other (Sharma 2004: 65),

Arranged marriages are born to Indians as clearly as the colour of their skins. Those who choose a different path, in the eyes of many Indians, are snakes who have shed their brown skins.

(*B and B* 2005: 165)

The young man as well as the young woman learns to put the common interest of the family before his own and to forget himself in the larger whole (Sharma 2004: 200). As a mode of example and a proof that this ideology can still be found in contemporary British literature, in *Chapatti or Chips* (2000), as in the other books, Naina is engaged to Ashock. Being another candidate for an arranged marriage in order not to lose her family, she

[...] accepted that Indian girls had to be respectful of Mum and Dad and all of India.

(*Ch or Ch* 2000: 31)

Nevertheless the initial acceptance of the Indian way is defined and negotiated within herself as regards her decisions about the first man to be with, violating thus the taboo of virginity and purity, and thus, the correct code of conduct,

She didn't know who she would end up marrying, but one thing she did know was that her husband would expect her to be pure and untouched by another man.

(*Ch or Ch* 2000: 26)

This discourse on sexuality emphasises the woman's power in the definition of her sexuality, pointing, once more, to the construction of a new femininity. She intends to find a balance and reach a consensus within herself between her social expectations and her natural desire, transgressing the traditional discourse on culture, sexuality and codes of conduct. Being aware of her responsibilities, having been born to Indian parents, her

doubts did not justify her failure to accomplish the rules that would prepare her as the model woman who would be desired by an Indian man and allow the members of the Indian community to organise her future, a time in which she would have no choice of word or action.

God, this was worse than she imagined it could be. She wasn't ready for marriage (...) she wasn't ready to become chained. But she wasn't ready to hurt her parents either. If she refused to marry Ashok, it would cause too much pain. And she couldn't live with their pain. So she had a choice. Pains or chains. And that's why she gave a shallow shrug and a lacklustre smile and left her parents organizing the rest of her life.

(Ch or Ch 2000: 55)

Despite her awareness of being a future wife, the unexpected cannot be planned for, her love for a man not chosen by her parents, and even worse for Indian culture, a white man. It is the unexpected that worsens the psychological battle with herself and what makes her dress her insecurities in the form of a questionnaire to Dave on questions about love, pregnancy, marriage and relationships. The psychological conflict is regarded as the means for the satisfaction of the social demands, as highlighted above. It is in this conflict that some of the most evident differences between the two cultures come to the front, the conception of love and the lack of closeness. Naina's forthcoming marriage showed the futility of the Western ideas of love and romance and marriage as a rite of passage,

If romance was a battlefield, then there are many dead egos lying around because of Indian women. But if weddings were a battlefield, then there were many dead romances lying around because of the Indian way.

(B and B 2005: 166)

Whereas the discourse opposing love and romance to arranged marriage accentuates the complexity of a hybrid culture and the difficulty of negotiation between the first and second generations, the traditional discourse of the future in the hands of the

generation in India and tradition will be changed in the later novels. On the arrival of the official engagement day,

No balloons, no booze, no party and no romance. Just the basic ring swap and plenty of panic. There would be no getting down on one knee, no cuddles and kisses, no weepy eyes, no scenes of the Eiffel Tower, no love. Just two sets of parents, swimming in pride.

(Ch or Ch 2000: 242)

Her inner feelings and hesitation point to the need to confide in someone, a white man, as studied in section 4.2.3. Nevertheless, in every attempt to talk about her concerns, something pushes her back and she becomes hesitant and looks for an agreement. In the midst of this complexity she should not be complaining as her actions corresponded to her choices, initially at least to Dave's eyes. Reciprocally, she also becomes Dave's confidant, a boy who abandoned by his mother learns to survive without any support, either economic or psychological. It is to her that he talks about his unhappy childhood.

How do you tell someone that you had a bastard of a step dad who treated you like shit? How do you tell someone that your mum betrayed you, and your real dad, when you cried for help, ignored the cries?

(Ch or Ch 2000: 78)

In spite of the relevance of this point, which is closely analysed in section 4.2.3, I cannot deviate from the topic that concerns us here, marriage. I would like to point out the case of Kully, Sushi's elder sister, much in the line of ideology and previous preparation for marriage in the maintenance of group beliefs and a prescribed code of conduct. With a coming marriage, she spends her time reading self-help books. As she says,

I'm enlightening myself on the social differences between men and women.

(TPG 2004: 4)

Kully's words stand as a direct and explicit reference to the conscious problems of gender. They foresee the existence of a particular social, cultural and sexual conduct defined not only in terms of politics and power but also within the field of a kind of literature that is currently springing up. It is her sister who has to apologise for Sushi's rude behaviour in an attempt to preserve traditional manners and protect Sushi's sister's status. To Sushi's immediate response,

I'm perfectly capable of apologising for myself; when I want to, that is.

(TPG 2004: 27)

With the answer provided above she is vindicating a freedom of action that has been censored for Indian women from the old time and that she is rewriting. Similarly to the older British Asian female characters, Sushi is expected to behave properly not only for herself but for her sister. Therefore when she jogged out of the café (TPG 2004: 35) to avoid Sammy and Arjun's company, two annoying friends, Kully reprimanded her as,

'Don't you know I'm getting married? I have to follow decorum. What if my in-laws had seen me running like that? What if somebody else had seen me and gone and told them? What if I'd twisted my ankle? What if...?' Kully carried on asking me questions my gob didn't care to answer.

(TPG 2004: 35)

Kully's words prove her determination to follow the traditional way with all its implications in conduct, the maintenance of honour and her respectable reputation in the public sphere as a good role model not only for her husband-to-be and her family but also for the rest of the community. Nevertheless, and as observed later in the book, a lack of decorum is equally punishable given the violation of the correct behaviour. As an instance after the wedding, Kully and Pardeep,

Were openly disrespecting Indian rules about public affection in the front room. Never show affection of the romantic type to anybody except the one you're being romantic to.

(TPG 2004: 202)

Thus, Kully is able to reprimand her sister Sushi for his behaviour before her wedding but fails to realise her own violation of the moral code of conduct later what partly proves the futility of rules.

The problematics of marriage do not only apply to the ceremony itself and the aftermath but also prior to it. It is here where the controversial relationship between Sushi and her aunts come to the front in their criticism of the quality of the Mehndi. The days before the wedding and during and after the *Mehnd*⁸-night bash. Mum, Worzel and Bimla discover the allotment and Sushi is described as “an ungrateful daughter and a football-playing, allotment-runaway freak” (TPG 2004: 115). Worzel and Bimla's, a neighbour, criticism on Kully's mehndi represents people's hypocrisy

‘No modesty or shyness from her.’

‘I must confess they've only had two sets for her. *Thoba thoba*. Where is the tradition in all of this? I wore more gold at Kamal Anti's funeral’.

(TPG 2004: 154)

This passage highlights the preference of nurture over nature. As a reaction, Sushi falls back on the criticism that can hurt them most, a direct attack on their daughters. This hypocrisy is rounded off by the reference to festivities like Christmas and Valentine's Day as a representation of power. That is, they are regarded a let-down and

Be aware that grown-ups do that sometimes: make you believe in things they don't believe in themselves –it's their way of asserting power.

(TPG 2004:161)

⁸ Mehndi is the application of henna as a temporary form of skin decoration in South Asia, South West Asia, North Africa and the Horn of Africa.

In this context the focus of interest also turns around the metaphors defining arranged marriage. It is referred to as “Arranged horror” (*Ch or Ch* 2004: 29). In *Saris and Sins* (2003) Kareena’s friends compare marriage to a prison,

Home was a prison where you were cooped up like a songbird waiting for freedom, but that freedom never came. What happened was that mum and dad married you off to Mr Right, who most likely would be Mr Wrong. You moved out of your home prison warden –the mother-in-law.

(*S and S* 2003: 37-38)

Even in a more recent novel, *Bindis and Brides* (2005) marriage is seen as a battlefield, a book in which the main female character and her sister “used to categorize marriageable men into four groups depending on how much they were willing to sacrifice for their women:

1. Loose a limb for a woman.
2. Risk their life for a woman
3. Lose their cock for a woman.
4. Lose their life for a woman”.

(*B and B* 2005: 300)

The quote highlights the triviality of sexuality and the frivolity of their feelings for men as a result of the image they manifest and gender polarisation. Furthermore, the third point can be read ironically as a result of the preference for sex in an escape for life responsibilities and commitments and where Joel stated he could not

[...] stand men who beat up their partners and I can’t stand men who take derogatory pictures of their partners and bribe them.

(*B and B* 2005: 290)

In Chapter 2 I mentioned that marriage is accepted within members of the same caste, not otherwise. Raj (Seena’s husband whose marriage is falling apart) was always reminded that he came from “a warrior caste, khatti, born a soldier, so there always had to be someone to fight” (*LHH* 1999: 103). However, Marina’s parents married against

their parents wishes (different castes. mum was a lower caste than dad). Who defined the store chart of the Indian caste system? Why is one shade of skin more acceptable than another? (*Ch or Ch* 2000: 186) While the only answer they always had was tradition, the only thing they looked for after having found love together was the blessings of their elders, which arrived on the birth of the first son. Their decision to let their son choose freely did not imply that deep down they wished he brought a Hindu girl. “Is this the request of a hypocrite? ‘They’d hypnotized”(*P and P* 2004: 187).

In a moment of weakness, and contrary to the other books, Marina (*Passion and Poppadoms* 2004) feels the need to receive her mother’s blessing concerning a hypothetical marriage with a white man in a hypothetical search for a *modified discourse*, following Pichler (2007) in her study of the discourse produced by British Bangladeshi girls on marriage. Her knowledge of the consequence of her actions and of her mother’s possible refusal makes her initiate the conversation in a way that strives to bring her mother into her own ground. Nevertheless, and in spite of giving her blessing and of her past, Marina’s dreams would be broken.

‘Mum, you’re clever, you have the wisdom of many years behind you. I have a moral question that needs the mind of a genius to answer it.’

‘That will be me,’ Mum agreed. ‘Go on.’

‘Am I, your daughter, good enough for any man?’ (...)

‘Look, you and Dad married each other even though you were from different castes. Right?’ Mum agreed. ‘And you have a lovely life together –not to mention a lovely daughter. My point is this, how would you feel, and remember this is hypothetical, how would you feel if the man who I chose was not quite the man you had in mind? I mean, if he was not a Hindu.’ (...)

‘I would have to be happy for you. But I am convinced that you will find a good Hindu boy. And, Marina, in my heart, I feel that the time is coming very soon. I can feel it.’

(*P and P* 2004: 297)

In this quotation, she emphasises some key issues of Hindu culture, marriage, its social organisation in castes, religion, Hinduism, and her mother’s experience in life.

Through a direct appeal to her mind and evidence of her mother's words on her daughter's happiness her effort to gain acceptance from her mother seems futile given her mother's words that,

I would have to say "yes", you would have my blessing. But, in my heart She paused. In my heart, Marina, my dreams would be dampened –hypothetical dreams, that is.

(*P and P* 2004: 298)

I have already considered Aaron and Jeena's friendship marriage in order for her parents to avoid to be sent to India for marriage. Given her parents' initial negotiation or acceptance they create their own means to escape. For the two generations, happiness is not defined in the same terms. Shouldn't they be pleased as long as he was happy? This is closely linked to the characters' cultural and personal background, a background to fight for so as to get a place in society. They have to embrace themselves first. Akkash, an elderly man and therapist, in a conversation with Raj, suffering from matrimonial problems, states:

The old ones. All men have to contend with the example set by the fathers. But for us, we are also having to reassess our cultural habits, too' (...) `It is extremely hard, having to dismantle your belief system. Because we you are not only having to question your attitudes as a man, but more specifically, as an Asian man (...) We are also the generation that can change things, redefine what being Asian means, without losing pride in who we are. Because culture evolves and changes, just like human beings.

(*LHH* 1999: 76)

In our culture the speaker has already started to change things around him contrary to other members of the group. At the same time, a clear and possible sense of responsibility is derived as the only response to the situation. This point makes us retake Hall's conception of identity as a production which is never complete but under a continuous process of change. In the process of change and evolution highlighted in the passage above the couple's decision, Raj and Seema, to attend a therapist session to solve

their matrimonial problems, means a step forward in comparison to what their parents would have done due to the equivalence of the session to “an admission of failure” (LHH 1999: 103). In this line, a hidden message may be that the individual’s situation does not always and only depend on gender and culture but on their decisions. Being supposed to be like her mother, whom everyone regarded as a saint, she is tired of the woman she is. As Seema maintains,

I’ve already had enough practice at being a good girl and keeping quiet and I’ve got lots more years to live and I’m scared of wasting them and I don’t have any more time to wait until my husband gets kinder or sexier or better, because I seem to have spent all my marriage waiting.

(LHH 1999: 104)

I observed that, contrary to the Western mind, for Indian people love grows with marriage and not prior to it. In our novels, the marriage between Marina and Thomas in *P and P* (2004) and between Jeena and Aaron in *The Marriage Market* (2006) contradicts this principle, which is regarded as one of the key differences between the two cultures, a contradiction that requires a negotiation on the meaning of love as regards the perception by the older generations. From the moment love prevails, the whole Indian system tumbles down as the traditional process finds itself altered and subject to modifications that in an old patriarchal society are difficult to accept. In the same way as the wrong and unfair preconceptions of the British, the effort to preserve tradition conveys a deterioration of the concept of love through the attribution of the British vices of lust and sex. A further reading would point to the devaluation of love given the lack of arguments that support the strictness of the Indian way to the detriment of the Western culture. It cannot be forgotten, as indicated in Chapter 2 that contrary to the West where love precedes marriage, in India love is supposed to grow with marriage and not conversely.

Love, in the way Jeena had meant it, was a word that didn’t sit too well in an Indian household. They saw it as a parasite feeding off Respect, Honour and Trust. Interfering in true family values. More a Western Word than Eastern.

Love meant lust; it means sex at all costs. Families split because of love. Unwanted babies were born because of love. Sexual diseases were transmitted because of love. Love was an own goal as far as Indian families were concerned. It was a sure-fire way of being relegated to the bottom of life's premiership.

(*The MM* 2006: 32)

While the female character has to defend love against the expectations of the Indian community in spite of its negative cultural attributes, a member of the white community recognizes the difficulty of finding love, keeping it and the hypocrisy hidden in any attempt to deny it as shown in a previous novel. As Cloey expresses through a metaphor of hunting,

Love is not random, Claudette, you can't rely on a good throw of the dice to fix you up with the man of your dreams. Love is like a rare animal, you have to hunt it down. And when you find it, you don't go giving it away to the nearest poacher like that wife of his. I hate her! She's got my bloody house!

(*S and S* 2003: 305)

The female characters are aware of the fact that, although they were born in Britain and most of them regard themselves as British, they are also conscious of their conduct expectations and the different periods they have to go through, including the perceptions by other members of their community, that is, the differences between before and after marriage. Their roles are clearly defined in each moment of their development.

Both she and Avani would argue that Indian boys were treated like Indian princes, while Indian girls were treated like...plain old Indian girls. Their parents would repeat the same old answer: when both Kareena and Avani were of marriageable age, when they married the Indian man, they could tell their husband all about their opinions. Until then, though -keep it shut.

(*S and S* 2003: 354)

This idea of gender difference and consciousness matches Bem's conception of people perceived through a 'lens' of gender polarisation (Bem 1993: 26) and assigned to apparently natural categories as maintained in Chapter 1. Not only does it entail a different status and power relations as a result of the social system but it also implies particular social and cultural responsibilities. This inequality of the sexes finds one of its forms in marriage, an institution that accentuates the gender polarisation highlighted above in the accomplishment of different gender roles and models. For rebellious Indian girls marriage is regarded as

The end of so many things. Dreams die young for some Indian girls (⋯)
reality takes a knife to their hopes, grabbing their fantasy around the jugular
and slipping the blade through its windpipe.

(*B and B* 2005: 125)

And as they recognize "WE HAVE BEEN RIPPED OFF! All in the name of religion." (*B and B* 2005: 125)

Contrary to the other novels, now Nisha Minhas in *The Marriage Market* (2006) presents a marriage between friends, a marriage of convenience to avoid an arranged marriage and that has been planned to end in divorce after a year. As can be seen from the very beginning the author breaks with one of the pillars of Indian culture.

The theory wasn't as far-fetched as one might think. As soon as an Indian girl marries an Indian man she automatically becomes his slave. And not only his slave but also the slave to the extended family. Washing, cleaning, cooking, ironing, chores, chores and chores. Ask most Indian women to sum up their marriage in one word and most would say, 'grafo'. Of course, the words 'used' 'bored' 'unappreciated' and 'wasted' wouldn't be too far away from their lips either.

(*The MM* 2006: 63)

This passage reproduces some of the traditional role models that support some of the principles of right conduct towards the husband and the family, the latter being the

most important institution in India. In fact, the maintainance of gender polarization and gender roles will guarantee the continuation of the old ways. In the case of a shame marriage, as Jeena labels it, behind her parents back and her refusal of annulment, the only solution is disownment, which develops in an “Us against Them situation” (*TMM* 2006: 146).

As considered in the book, the marriage between Jeena and Aaron, as a marriage performed under the British rules, was not even recognized by the Sikhs as authentic. One had to take the oaths under the sacred book, the *Guru Granth Sahib* for it to be legitimate. In not so many words, under the rules of Sikhism, Jeena was living in sin with Aaron. It would be impossible for her parents to marry her off after a failed marriage and a divorce with a white man. Given Aaron’s defence of Jeena’s happiness over tradition as mentioned in a previous section, her parents accept their daughter’s marriage on the grounds that it is followed by a Sikh marriage so that it can be validated as legitimate by the *Guru Granth Sahib* so despite the consensus reached certain morals have to be accomplished.

As a mode of conclusion and as noted above, I highlighted marriage as the individual aim in life and the difference between arranged and forced marriage so as not to fall into wrong misconceptions. Contrary to Hindu and Sikh cultures, more and more women are getting married later due to their desire for further education. This creates a generational conflict although the result, as usual, is acceptance by their elders, which can also be seen in India. As a mode of example, in *Difficult Daughters* (1998), Manju Kapur presents Shakuntala, a talented teacher, as an inspiring example for the young ones. She could be considered as the new woman in India, a model of the modern woman who studies, teaches and gets involved in political movements, even after marriage. As she states,

Women are still supposed to marry, and nothing else (...) My friends are from different backgrounds, all have families unhappy, with their decision not to settle down, as they call it.

(*DD* 1998: 17)

This discourse marks more distance from the older generations in the form of an afterthought. The state of an unmarried woman is considered an insult to the mother and an obstacle for a complete achievement in life. Normally few dared to mention Shakuntala's unmarried state (*DD* 1998: 15), a portrayal not far from what can be found in the books published in England.

In England it also becomes a key element in the shaping of gender relations. In fact, it was time for Marina to get married before it was too late. This situation is expressed in metaphorical terms with the comparison with the market and the quality of fruit.

Her ovaries will pack up. Nasty business. He really referred to the market of arranged marriages. Where women, like fruit, are great when ripe, but when bruised and old, get left until last. Only the desperate and needy will buy old, bruised fruit. And Marina, so pretty and intelligent, was not about to be married to a desperate needy man. Her life had been free, she'd had her choices and chances, but sometimes a daughter of strong mind will not ask for help when she needs it most.

(P and P 2004: 318)

A market that is driven by offers and demands and where the potential buyer's power of selection in search for quality is in the parents's hands but which also runs the risk of devaluing in price if the quality of the product, in this case, British Asian women, is not guaranteed permanently. In the end love triumphs over culture limitations. As a clear example of this, Thomas' decision to be frank with himself leads him into a process of satisfaction and personal accomplishment in the form of a position that represented most of the conceptions he had always been against and that have already been highlighted in section 4.2.4.3. As he himself states,

Who sets life's standards? Who follows other people's principles? What right did anyone have to say a man and a woman of different backgrounds couldn't be happy together, shouldn't be happy together? Surely people didn't fall in love because both knew which fork to use with which course? Or who

pronounced the Ps and Qs correctly. Love is more brutal than that. If ever there was something without manners it was love.

(*P and P* 2006: 415)

These questions move along the same line as the questions raised by British Asian girls concerning the origin of the older generations, right, power and authority to act and think the way they do. So in a way Thomas' choice to be honest and truthful gains him the acceptance of Marina's parents, as shown in similar themes in other books by Nisha Minhas.

The causes of divorce are mainly caused by the slavery to the strict Indian code, and with this, the women's subjugation to the husband to the detriment of the need for them to have a space of their own, and the extremes they represent being moral and physical abuse as portrayed in the following section.

4.2.6 *One of the English diseases* (LHH 1999)

In British multicultural society divorce is made possible through the swift between cultures and the change from silence into words contrary to the pillars of Indian culture in which it is not only punished but also considered the woman's responsibility for not having made the effort and sacrifice required to keep marriage alive. As a direct instance of the conception of divorce in Indian culture, and as one more instance of a code of conduct and control over the individual,"If you look for the word divorce in the Indian dictionary, you won't find it" (*S and S* 2003: 381).

In a patriarchal and hierarchical society like the Indian the wife is expected to live and respect her husband and family. Whenever these pillars are betrayed the immediate response is the woman's guilt and her punishment for destroying their family. In some cases, the culture weight is taken to the extreme by the husbands' murder of their children, of which several instances are mentioned in Meera Syal's book *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (1999). The situation of women being stabbed to death after collecting her children from a custody visit, the existence of wife murder and husbands taking their children and not being seen again stand as a representation of these atrocities. A cruel example of the

reality of some women after separation from their husband, which qualifies as wrongful behaviour is shown with Jasbinder Singh. After her separation she had to witness the death of her two sons at the hands of their father. His refusal to hand his children back after a custody visit corresponds to his view that his sons should live with him and his parents. Her threat to call the police leads to him locking the car, setting fire to it and burning himself and his sons to death. The immediate justification of this behaviour was *karma*, the woman's fate for leaving the husband while nobody dared to blame him, and the courts consideration of the act as

[...] an act of passion, a tragic event. I (Jasbinder Singh) want this event called what it was, murder.

(LHH 1999: 218)

Jasbinder, as well as the other Indian women attending the therapy sessions, are all women with a proper name and identity. As has been observed in section 2.1.4.5 divorce is not accepted when one of the spouses has after the solemnization of the marriage, treated the petitioner with cruelty [1(ia)] or when he husband has, since the solemnization of the marriage, been guilty of rape, sodomy or [bestiality; or] (...) [2(ii)]. Thus, according to these rules, the examples of brutality commented in Meera Syal's *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (1999) as well as in Nisha Minhas *Bindis and Brides* (2005) as indicated below, are cause for divorce on legal terms and highly criticised by the Indian community, but for lots of women they are still responsible for their treatment rather than victims of the system. The extremes of their culture is such that as Meena's Divorced Auntie maintains, in spite of

Five broken ribs, nose broken twice, broken arm, burns to chest. No low-cut tops for me, sweetie. And I am the whore for leaving him, apparently.

(LHH 1999: 81)

Within the prevalent ideology divorce is not accepted and as Sushi states in her Rule No 42: Never, ever divorce. That option is taken away once you get married in *The Pocket Guide To Being An Indian Girl* (2004). Thus, as can be observed, women are

beginning to oppose the system and take action in the demand of their rights. Take as an instance a newer book, *Bindis and Brides* (2005).

In an interview by Shelina Begum for *AIM*, Nisha Minhas (1.6.2005) the writer stated that this novel is

[...] about failed arranged marriages and how it's still taboo to get divorced and make it on your own. It is about how failed marriages can bring shame onto the family. It does happen and I think I've reflected that.

Contrary to her cultural expectations, after leaving her husband because of physical and psychological abuse, Zarleena, the female protagonist in *Bindis and Brides* (2005), runs her own business -a saris shop; an action treated with irony by her husband whose frustration is showed in his recognition of her capability to have a life of her own;

Isn't opening a bridal-wear shop stretching the imagination a bit? You weren't exactly a model bride, were you? Armin examined his wife, unhappily noting that she looked well. Crap in the kitchen, crap in bed, pretty crap all around I'd say. You know how the first cooked chapatti is thrown in the bin because it never cooks right? That's how I think of you. You were never right.

(*B and B* 2005: 108)

It is with education and work that there comes independence. If her parents had known about her daughter's future, they would have kept her husband away from her and spared her a relationship full of terror and tears. The only relief she had was that it was not her sister Honey who had to marry him, Zarleena was the first-born-daughter. Her decision was criticised by Prem, Armin's cousin. She had become too westernized, in India she could have been burnt for her behaviour. Two fronts can be clearly identified. Firstly Zarleena and Armin

So was the change in Armin's personality the moment Zarleena became his wife -or rather, the moment Zaeleena became his. It put a new slant on the

arranged marriage; Zarleena had become the arranged “punched bag” instead.

(B and B 2005: 57)

And on the other her parents’ guilt for their mistake. The following passage moves towards a new modified discourse on the parents’ -daughter relationship and highlights a hybrid tradition that combines the parents’ blessing on the husband-to-be, but this being chosen by their daughters regardless of ethnicity.

Their decision would haunt her mother and father for evermore. It’s every parent’s nightmare to know that their children are in pain. But to know that because of your decision your own child suffered in unimaginable ways, well, nightmare didn’t quite cover that. It was a feeling of extreme guilt tied up with extreme regret. Enough of a feeling to question the very roots of your traditions. Reason to ask yourself the question, ‘Are arranged marriages really the best way?’ Handing your daughter over to a man who was a virtual stranger.

(B and B 2005: 143)

Despite being aware of their guilt they do not fall into prejudices or misconceptions that would not let their daughters to have happy marriages. That is, what happened to their daughter is considered as part of bad luck but they express their wish not to go through the same process once more and Indian culture is given a new air with a re-definition of some of its key issues, in this case the choice of the right partner.

Zarleena’s parents weren’t naïve enough to believe that all arranged marriages turn out to be arranged marriages from hell, but they weren’t gamblers enough to go through the traditional process again. From that moment on, the custom blinkers were off. Any man whom either Zarleena or Honey wanted to marry would be blessed by them. Whether he be black, white, brown or green.

(B and B 2005: 143)

They all become the victims of their own experience and tradition from the moment a bride is not only given to the husband but also to his family. With Zareena's parents' repentance of their wrong decision to marry their daughter off to the wrong man, this novel proves a step forward, contrary to *Saris and Sins* (2003) where marriage had to be kept and respected no matter what happened. Despite their questioning of arranged marriage, the only limitation on their daughter now concerns her relationship with Joel, which had the condition that she did not see him again until after divorce. Therefore together with her parent's repentance after the completion of the strict Indian ways, Zarleena's decision to keep away from Joel, until after her divorce combines a respect to her gender roles and the achievement of peace of mind. This tranquillity is the direct consequence of her satisfaction after having been able to find a balance between her cultural and social responsibilities and her growth as a woman in a dual context. As she considers,

I promise that I will never see this white man again, and I beg for your forgiveness,'Zarleena half whispered.

`Then I suppose that I shall have to forgive you, 'Mum said. `But I need your word that you will do nothing like this again.'

`You have my word, Maji.'

`You can pick and choose whichever man you want once your divorce is settled, but until the time you play by the rules you agreed to. You are still married to Aaron until that divorce paper comes through. (...) Not another word about this ever again.'

(*B and B* 2005: 339)

This negotiation and consensus about the correctness of actions before divorce becomes official relates to "the complexity and the success of the negotiations in their group, emphasising the active role the girls playing (re)shaping cultural norms around marriage" (Pichler 2007: 84) and the parents' acceptance of the need for reshaping some of the unwritten laws of tradition. As the female protagonist states,

I felt like I have betrayed the Eastern morals you taught me just for a quick grope of the Western morals. I'm too ashamed to look you in the eye.

(*B and B* 2005: 338)

The worst consequences of arranged marriages, the acceptance of tradition and the desire not to betray the family, can lead to beatings, infidelity and fears. According to the *Hindu Marriage Act, 1955* in the section Nulity of Marriage and Divorce, Kareena's marriage was to be dissolved by a decree of divorce as her husband had had sexual intercourse with a person other than his wife and he had treated his wife with cruelty. "Their marriage was to be built on trust; not on the cheap foundations of infidelity" (*B and B* 2005: 267). It is in the terrain of unfaithfulness that the reader faces what has been regarded as Indo-chic (Mita 2007), that is, the act of taking elements of Indian culture and using it in the wrong way. Thus, in the decline of her relationship with Samir, unfaithful to his wife, Cloey wanted to surprise him and wore a

[...] red and gold bindi stuck to her forehead and henna doodled all over her hands.

(*S and S* 2003: 324)

and played Hindi music. If we apply the definition of Indo-chic indicated above, Cloey, an English woman has transgressed and shown her lack of understanding of Indian culture as the use of a bindi is traditionally worn by married women as a proof of their married state. Nevertheless it is becoming a decorative element without cultural and social connotations.

Similarly to Cloey, on her suspicion of Thomas' infidelity, Nicole thinks about cooking an Indian meal and watching the DVD *Bend it like Beckham* (2002) by the director Gurinder Chadha to Thomas' astonishment. Therefore both women employ Indianness in the strategical perspective, the former to achieve her dark aims to walk over men and obtain what she wants no matter the means and the latter to prove a case of supposed infidelity. Both would stand as an example of "manufacturing cultural ignorance" (Banerjee 2007:70) and may be regarded as "a parade of the Indianization of

British culture” (ibid 65) far removed from the authenticity of the Indian culture and customs.

4.2.7 Becoming parents

In the previous section the analysis highlighted the different periods the characters had to go through, the period before marriage and marriage itself being two of the most significant ones. In this way the birth of a child becomes a crucial step in the preservation of identity and tradition. Once people become parents their life changes, and identity and the self go through a process of transformation and construction which is never completely fulfilled.

While the woman wields little authority directly after marriage, after having children, especially sons, and with more experience, her influence will increase. This transformation in the women’s personality can be exemplified with Sunita’s words in *Life isn’t all ha ha hee hee* (1999) when she refers to the fact of being a good mother. It is possible to love without expecting anything-portrayal of women’s sensitivity.

For a woman your whole sense of I is transformed when you become a mother. The I becomes We (capital letters), forever, and of course that has profound implications for your primary relationships. It’s amazing really, how much truth there is in our mum’s witchy sayings (Sunita).

(LHH 1999: 295)

As observed in Chapter 2, motherhood is symbolically attached to the country of origin, India in this case. Nevertheless the birth of one preferred gender over the other to the detriment of girl is still part of a given reality.

Most Indian or British-Asian born women are unable to know the sex of their baby due to hospital policy after some women opted for terminations after finding out they were carrying girls. The impact of the issue is such that a film has been released condemning this practice. As is considered in an article for *AIM* (AIM 22.04. 2008),

Screening India's missing girls, in the summer of 2007 a farmer in southern India found a two-day old baby girl who had been buried alive. Rushed to the local hospital, she miraculously survived, a slice of luck many Indian girl babies do not have in India today. The film, directed by Ashok Prasad in 2008, tells the story of the thousands of girls who are killed every year simply because of their gender; most are aborted as soon as their sex is determined, some are abandoned at birth, while others are killed, shortly after.

In accordance with Hindu and his mother's expectations, Hemant, educated in America and without an expected progressist ideology fails to develop a more liberal attitude and wished to marry an Indian woman not only because of his responsibility towards his family in Delhi but also because, as he states,

I wanted someone who would fit in with our family life. American women are too demanding. Their men have to cater all their whims and fancies.

(AMW 2003: 40)

He, a man who unlike the previous Indian generations, wished to have a daughter rather than a son. The behaviour adopted by American women is contrasted to the Indian women's silence and submissiveness to the husband, as highlighted above, and stands as a clear example of the ideological distance between the women from the two cultures.

Not only do we find a parallelism between some of the female characters in the books written by Nisha Minhas and Manju Kapur's novel concerning marriage, the submission to the husband or a rebellious attitude but also a new awakening that leads the women from the two communities to adjust to their own needs and not someone else's; an awakening that involves the desire not to be constrained within the household but to have the freedom to move beyond it, to make their own decisions and fulfil the need to change and evolve.

Hemant's conception of women crashes against his ideas of fatherhood, although in the end he will become one more Indian man anchored in tradition and culture despite his time and contact with American culture. His words,

In America there is no difference between boys and girls. How can this country get anywhere if we go on treating our women this way?

(AMW 2003: 57)

Thus, surprisingly, after the birth of their daughter he pushes his wife to give him a boy and gender differences come to light with rather distant comments. As regards the daughter, Anuradha, “girls who look like their father are lucky” (AMW 2003: 58), “ideas about fatherhood are so antiquated in India” (AMW 2003: 60), when they wrongly thought it would be a son he says, “A great son of a great father” (AMW 2003: 57). As to the son, Himanshu, for a man his first marriage is the principal marriage only if he has children, mainly sons, as indicated in chapter 2. When he is born, Astha’s mother states “the family is complete at last” (AMW 2003: 68).

Astha was given gold jewellery and a new sari. Anuradha and the child’s aunts were given gold necklaces. The new-born was given gold guineas. Astha was officially declared the mother of a son. Her status rose, and she pushed from her mind thoughts of what might have happened had she been unable to do her duty.

(AMW 2003: 69)

Between the birth of the two children Hemant had changed from “being an old-American father to being an all-Indian one” (AMW 2003: 70) and she changed from a woman who wanted love to a woman who valued independence in the time between her marriage and the birth of her children. In the course of time she gets more involved in political and social activities. This means having to leave her children at home and having arguments with her husband and her interfering mother-in-law. Being sick of sacrifice, she “was fed up with the ideal Indian womanhood used to trap and jail” (AMW 2003: 168). Paradoxically, this search for the fulfilment of her needs and her involvement in the social and political causes in Delhi caused worries about her children’s idea of her as a mother. As she maintains,

I hope my children aren't tainted by his [Hemant] idea of my duty. I don't want them to think I am abandoning them. What if they are taught that while I am away?

(AMW 2003: 251)

Linking this situation to the books published in England, the extreme is represented with the marriage between Sunil and Neena (*B and B* 2005), a woman, Neena, subject to husband's rape regardless of her eight-month pregnancy in a show of violence while whispering "if you don't give me a boy, you'll see what happens. The End" (*B and B* 2005: 123) and as a representation of the man as a kind of omniscient God.

The issue that gives the name to this section needs further attention. Whereas in *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (1999) motherhood was seen as the genesis of a strong meaning of self and as the awakening into a new life of independence in *Saris and Sins* (2003) birth adopts a new perspective in mixed race relationships. I have already analysed Armin's extramarital relationship with a white woman, Cloey, not being emotionally strong enough to confront his traditional parents. On Cloey's invention of her pregnancy and to Armin's surprise, her answer develops as follows,

Do you honestly think that I would carry a broan baby in my womb? I can't think of anything more disgusting, can you, Asylum Seeker?.

(*S and S* 2003: 402)

It is then when he realises she is only interested in his money and that he did not really know the woman for whom he had risked not only his family honour but also his wife, despite it having been an arranged marriage. Together with this, Cloey's words show her view of the superiority of the white race, and with this a power hierarchy, a discourse on child bearing and mixed relationships, that is different from the other novels included in the primary bibliography.

I have already referred to the punishment suffered by women who go against the Indian way. In section 4.2.4.1 Mr. Akhtar, Jeena's boss, verbally abuses Jeena for

marrying a white man. In this abuse a clear comment is made on the future children's identity in which he includes some of the key issues in Indian culture: identity, castes, religion, marriage and within the latter, mixed race marriages;

Have you thought of the consequences of bringing a half-caste baby into this world? The ridicule it would receive for being a mixture of brown skin and white skin! I suppose if you have children, if God allows it, then they will be as confused about their identities as any kid could possibly be. It's one of the main reasons that mixed relationships are discouraged, Mrs. Myles, you must know that.

(TMM 2006: 228)

A half-caste baby with a mother deprived of the official recognition and pride of the community as opposed to AMW (2003) as indicated above, which shows, once again, a class and gender inequality. The passage above highlights the creation of a pure race that does not admit any relationship between members of different castes and cultures and the maintainance, once more, of a code of conduct kept through generations. In *Tall, Dark and Handsome* (2007), the adoption of an Indian girl, Saffron, by white parents and her need to know about her finishes the book with Saffron's last words "I will never abandon you, my darling, ever!" (TMM 2006: 515) on the birth of her first daughter and her imminent marriage with Cory; the theme submerges the reader into the most basic reality in India, and more specifically, the reasons to take the children to an orphanage due to a cluster of factors including the father's death, the lack of economic resources, the deterioration of children's health through lack of nourishment and the need to give a child to an orphanage so that not all of them die.

4.2.8 Sexuality and desire in Hindu and Sikh culture questioned

In a society where shaking hands is a sign of modernity and giving a kiss in encounters is inadmissible because of its sexual connotations Western behaviour is considered corrupt. Not only do traditional Indian customs refuse physical contact except for members within the same family and friends of the same sex but women are also

expected to remain virgins until after marriage. Given the restrictions of the characters' sexual conduct in terms of virginity the only escape is lies and the ironic play with stereotypes. In this light, Saffron in *Tall, Dark and Handsome* (2007) provides a comic treatment of the obscurity of the Indian woman's virginity,

She had to lie about only nine boyfriends when she said, 'Of course!' Besides an Essex girl doesn't legitimately lose virginity until she's slept with twenty men (everyone knows that).

(TDH 2007: 247)

Going back to the early years of Indian immigration into Britain, mixed marriages and sexual relations were two of the distinguishing features between the immigrants and the host community, a way, "to express their [immigrants] voluntary exclusion" (Desai 1963: 122).

Sex has been considered as a binary system, in terms of the licit and illicit, the permitted and the forbidden, a field in which the uniqueness of the individual's role is also revealed. Thus, although the older daughter is expected to tell her younger sister about her first night with her husband-to-be, the former is also aware of the bulk of limitations that restrict the amount of information that she is allowed to transmit.

Older Indian sisters are obligated by an unwritten law [sometimes referred to as tradition without any explanation but it is the way it is] to explain to their younger sisters what's hidden under an Indian man's *kacchas* – underpants – and what will befall her on her wedding night. Indian mothers will only go so far with the grisly details. And younger Indian sisters always want the gristle.

(S and S 2003: 50)

In this vein, for an Indian woman to know when a man wants sex, how to perform it and her conception as a valueless human being if a man is not fulfilled as "sex was all about the little signs he gave out" (S and S 2003: 155) marks a strict sexual conduct with

the limitations of roles in active and passive attributes as well as Aristotle's vision of the relationship between men and women as political, the relation of the ruler over the ruled when he refers to feminine virtues, the man being the ruler and the ruled the woman, subject to masculine desire and restrained from freedom of expression or action. No matter the way, the aim is the fulfilment of men's pleasure regardless of the other gender's feelings of self expression and satisfaction. It is in the relationships between a white man and a British-Asian girl that the sexual encounters are not based on power but on cooperation and mutual fulfilment and satisfaction.

Until now, and contrary to both the Hindu and Sikh code, British-Asian girls had sexual relationships before marriage, being thus, sexually experienced. In *The Marriage Market* (2006) Jeena moves a step forward and has had several boyfriends, mostly white, which is considered as impure to the extent that Sikhs and Hindus "incur greater ritual impurity through sexual contact with an outsider" (Desai 1963: 123). Furthermore, the socially-assumed purity of women was highly valued and that marks a difference concerning men. As maintains her last conquest, Aaron,

If he had known that he would have been insulting an entire nation of Indian people by having sex with one of their women out of wedlock then he would have thought twice about mounting her.

(*The MM* 2006: 24)

The comparison of lust, tradition and love finds its clearest expression in the battlefield; an arena in which love and arranged marriage are clearly polarised. As can be observed in the following passage,

Lust and Tradition have had some battles over the years. But when the bugle sounds and the back-up army of love joins the attack, it's game over guys, tradition is defeated. How could an Indian woman possibly believe that an arranged marriage is the best way after experiencing the power of love?

(*TMM* 2006: 66)

Contrary to the Indian prevalence of the marriage over love as love comes later, this discourse on tradition and love is modified and the individual's experience cannot be disguised by unwritten rules that have persisted through generations and that are part of that implied code of conduct defended in this thesis. This takes us to the fact that "conduct manuals document nostalgic belief in a "natural" self that ought to be in harmony with its needs and desires" (Armstrong and Tennenhouse 1987: 73), so that the characters' feelings and desires are linked to natural impulses away from artefacts, training and false appearances.

I have already pointed out the jealousy felt by Aaron as he is aware of Jeena's new relationship with another man, Sam, even worse a white man. It is then when Jeena begins to feel a new experience of lust and betrayal, "half her heart ticking with the excitement of lust, the other half beating with betrayal" (*TMM* 2006: 268), "a mixture of happiness and guilt" touching another man. Therefore, regardless of having gone through a friendship marriage without any type of compromise of her freedom, she still maintained a personal morality and responsibility towards her *friendship husband*. Moreover, and contrary to her expected behaviour, she disobeys the Sikh rules according to which there are five robbers in this body, Lust, anger, greed, attachment and pride (Guru U III, Sorath Rag), Entangled in greed, lust and passion, I commit many sins (Guru V, Bihagara Rag), Lust, anger, greed pride and passion, By following these one cannot get peace (Guru V, Sorath Rag). According to these rules from the *Guru Granth Sahib*, she has infringed lust, by fulfilling her natural desires, greed, for giving her body to what is refused by the members of her community and attachment, the latter understood as attachment to the corrupting Western values and not the Sikh code. It is this behaviour that intoxicated with lust you are lost in passions, and do not distinguish between vice and virtue (Bainiji, Sri Rag).

The frivolity and irony in the references to safe sex together with hypocrisy become the norm not only in the early novels by Meera Syal and Nisha Minhas but also on the recently published ones. Thus,

Believe me, for single Asian girls, there is no such thing as safe sex. When you ask a guy if he's got protection, what you mean is, has he got tinted windows, safety locks and a baseball bat in the boot, in case of passing brothers? Of course, you learn to be imaginative, because of space, cramp and because you're scared of coming back in the next life with something with fur because you're doing something you're not supposed to.

(LHH 1999: 30)

Thus, safety is not understood as the security of not having an undesired procreation but in the fact of not being caught having sex by any member of your community because of the censorship and the hard punishment it would involve.

On some occasions I have already mentioned the role of literature as a representation of reality and the hypothetical perspective of the literature read as books of conduct. In this line, the lack of identification of safe sex with British-Asian girls is, once more, part of that discourse of a restrictive culture. Or read with a different light, girls who are supposed not to have sex before marriage do not need to protect themselves against its pleasures. This view develops into a frivolous treatment of the issue and of the sexual role played by British-Asian women who realise that despite the changing times they are still tied to a traditional role. Therefore while British-Asian women were more in touch with their sexuality, their sexual role was still dependent on their husbands; "the crucial role of the Indian bride on her wedding night is a submissive role: to be a shy, timid, good Indian girl" (*B and B* 2005: 277), a night in which any sexual toy is censored.

On the opening of her shop, Zarleena refers to women's sexual role with a customer bride-to-be, Sarina. Not only does she describe Sarina's flat stomach "It look like she hadn't eaten calories for years. Probably just existing on a diet of fear sandwiches and fear soup" (*B and B* 2005: 272),

Fear because her parents had ordered her to remain slip for her husband-to-be. Fear because this was fashionably 'in' for Indian brides these days. And most definitely fear because come the wedding night she would be

showing her naked body to a man for the first time and the last words she wanted her new husband to say were, ‘ Would you mind if I turned off the lights?’.

(*B and B* 2005: 272)

The wedding night becomes a moment in which innocence is preferred to sexual competence and which raises the question, are not all these orders part of the code of conduct transmitted for centuries? This attitude regarding sex brings up one of the differences between the two communities. In the early novel *Anita and Me* (1996), one of the differences between the Indian and English people had to do with affection,

I noticed there was never any show of affection, no hugs or kisses, not like my parents for whom every leavetaking was accompanied by squeezes, contact numbers on the journey in case of breakdown or terrorist kidnap and always a folded white hanky.

(*AM* 1996: 20)

This lack of feelings attached to the British polarises the attraction and passion felt by the British Asian characters towards white men beyond a codified behaviour and the existing sexuality restrictions. This attitude and conduct is interpreted as the lack of love by the younger generations and as the obligation of women to work, a role traditionally attached to men and who “must feel like ghosts. Poor men. Poor women” (*AM* 1996: 20).

4.2.8.1 *Sexuality*

As indicated by Foucault (1998: 43) the 19th century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious psychology. Heterosexuality, “the metaphor through which the peer social order organises itself” (Eckert and McConnell 2002: 26) would be the accepted choice, and as such it is defended in the novels under study as characteristic of a patriarchal society.

Rather than being portrayed as a biological reality it is approached as a twofold perspective. As a first perspective the awareness of their mother's reality make women need emotional, not physical contact with other women, a metaphor of the need for affection of which they are deprived for them due to the implications of a loveless arranged marriage. As Beroze sates in a conversation with Suki,

Believe me, girlfriend, you move to the next generation down and you will not be sorry. They've all grown up with sisters like me – notice I did not say mothers– and some of them actually like women, prefer women, because they've seen their mums go through such bullshit with their dads.

(LHH 1999: 167)

Thus homosexuality is not regarded as an inborn trait but a state that comes from and that is fostered by tradition constraints. Nevertheless, in contradiction with the limitation mentioned before, in *The Marriage Market* (2006) it derives from a lonely childhood without parents. Take the example of a conversation between Aaron and his grandmother in one of the Father's visits. As Aaron said,

Maybe Father Karras was right. He showed me this article about children brought up without their parents. Apparently, many of them turned out to be homosexuals.

(TMM 2006: 197)

A Married Woman (2003) is the only novel out of the two in this study in which the author presents a lesbian relationship -a relationship that could not be easily suspected by a husband but that still involves secrecy and that remains outside the moral Hindu code. It is the relationship between Astha, married and with children, and Pipee, adventurous and unconventional and Aijaz's widow, a local political activist. On the one hand, "And it also felt strange, making love to a friend instead of an adversary" (AMW 2003: 231). On the other, and on the social scale, it results from a culturally imposed sexuality that does not understand the love –passion nexus, confidence and reciprocity. Consequently, it forces the emergence of feelings for members of the same sex, which in the case of women, would not only be censored, as it is, but that would not be believed of

them. Therefore, in the process of becoming good and desirable role models, the community seems to assume that they will not dare a homosexual relationship.

So far as marriage was concerned, they were both women, nothing was seriously threatened. Meanwhile her best time at home was when she was fantasising about the one she loved without interruptions, lost in her thoughts, wallowing in her feelings.

(AMW 2003: 232)

Therefore homosexuality is not regarded in terms of pathology or in terms of prohibition as has been considered in Chapter 2 but as a choice; against all the odds it is their love what keeps them alive. It stands as an example of Cora Caplan's position of homosexuality as a scape from patriarchal control as indicated in 2.1.8.1.1. In Pipee's opinion

It is more a question of choice than people make out. That is what I believe at any rate. Besides sex is sex, don't you think? It is other things that become important.

(AMW 2003: 220)

Given this situation the reader cannot but question whether this homosexuality is natural or forced on them by the repressive circumstances of repression, lack of freedom and loneliness. It may be interpreted as the only love option available that help them accept, not without resignation, their reality and fear for cultural rebellion. A very significant comment is made on the issue after seeing Tania's film; the conversation among Manju, Chila and Leila develops into a criticism of the young girls for their unattractiveness,

Maybe that's the idea, said Chila unexpectedly. Or maybe they're both married with five kids each. Maybe that's why they didn't have time to put make-up on.

Oh my dear, soothed Leila, I'm not shocked at all. In Pakistan I met so many women who were in love with their sisters-in-law or whatever. Hardly surprising when they have so little contact with the men. But they still got married, had children, kept everything going. One has to. It's perfectly OK to have girlfriend as long as you realise it's just a hobby, really.

(LHH 1999:159)

This passage that combines the tradition of a politically correct sexual conduct and the contemporary and progressist belief in a homosexuality understood as temporal and that does not constitute a threat to what really matters. That is, this awakened sexuality as a need involves a fulfilment that poses no threat to the family structure and the expected dependence of women.

4.2.8.2 *Pleasure and desire*

As has been considered in Chapter 2, India developed an *ars erotica* in which pleasure is understood as a practice and accumulated as experience, a feeling which is defined not in terms of the permitted and the forbidden but in relation to itself. Contrary to what is expected from an Indian woman, who is not allowed to go through this feeling, Kareena's recognition of the violation of her moral code through what would be regarded as impure thoughts by her parents' community is accompanied by an innocent and subconscious comment which really appeals to her real emotions and conscience. Thus, in a conversation with Samir, her husband, she states:

Apparently I'm not allowed to feel any pleasure myself -as that means I'm not doing my job properly with you. Anyway, I shouldn't even be discussing this with you.' (...) 'Excuse me for being a woman, but a girl deserves the odd orgasm here and there, doesn't she? Indian or not.' Her nervous giggle followed.

‘Of course she does,’ he said, smugly.

‘I look forward to having one then.’ Kareena laughed. ‘Whoops! Sorry.’

(*S and S* 2003: 276)

With all this, the passage challenges the female sexual conduct and, thus, redefines the political view of the man as the ruler falling now in the hands of the opposite gender, conversely to Aristotle’s initial view. Kareena’s words stand as a way of vindicating her condition as a human being, her sexuality and criticise the lack of sexual pleasure as part of the existing codified behaviour; her feeling of pleasure would be understood as the failure of her expectations. It opposes the concept of pleasure as experience as defended in Chapter 2 as she is devoid of it.

Not only does her restrictive culture prohibit her from pleasure but her speech is also oppressed; as a woman she is not expected to talk about any issue concerning sex even in a husband who after having sex with his wife for the second time defined it as a future of loveless boredom. At the same time Kareena’s comment on being a woman and the excuses for it provides one of the instances of metalanguage, already considered in section 1.3. The characters are conscious of their gender and make it part of their discourse, a modified form of discourse as to sex in this case, rephrasing Pichler (2007). Similarly, fully aware of the positive qualities of pleasure, the Greeks gave great importance to any action or gesture that produced it, the so called *aphrodisiac* (pleasures of the body)

Without thinking, almost in a panic, Thomas leant across and kissed her on her lips.

ZUGZWANG!

The kiss grew to a snog; the bench creaking in harmony with their moans. This was a moment that belonged in her dreams. Except in her dreams the kiss had never been this pleasurable. She’d never experienced this kind of voltage before.

(*P and P* 2004: 371)

The impulsiveness of her feelings shows that cultural and social constraints cannot deprive the individual of her natural and impulsive feelings.

Like pleasure, the ideological standpoint of desire is reflected in Nisha Minhas's first and third novels. In spite of the female characters awareness of their cultural and social repression they cannot but let their feelings and impulses show themselves. In the beginning Naina, the female character in *Chapatti or Chips* (2000) knew she had to be a virgin; however, being aware of a future arranged marriage, she would not allow another person to determine her sexual conduct, and with this, her purity and relationship with a man regardless of her future husband. This self-determination finds its profound meaning in the feelings felt for a white man; her attraction for Dave, the only man who gave her sexual feelings, does not respond to cultural motives but natural impulses beyond reason, expressed in metaphorical terms,

He was like a naughty cream cake: you know you shouldn't eat it, but it doesn't stop you looking at it. It doesn't stop you just wanting just a bite, knowing full well that probably every beautiful woman in the vicinity has already had a slice, or a lick, or a taste. But it wasn't just Dave's cream that Naina wanted.

(*Ch or Ch* 2000: 31)

She also wanted his ambition, intelligence, understanding and, more important, protection. The female characters modify and reach a consensus with themselves as concerns their sexual conduct so that their desires are not defined by the others and being fully aware of the "female desire expressed outside the paternally regulated exchange of marriage as a movement towards dishonour and death" (Armstrong and Tennenhouse 1987: 144). This consensus brings into disrepute culturally specific conventions and carries a self identity definition. In fact, and as has been highlighted in the first part of this thesis regarding desire and Alice Deigman's work (See section 2.1.8.1.2), desire is an external force that the individual cannot resist:

Naina felt he was about to turn her life upside down. She had dreamed of him wildly making love to her, and the feeling of what he was about to do was spinning her around inside. She wanted to let go of all she had known; all those harsh rules; all those frustrating feelings of save, save, save. She couldn't be saving herself for Armin, a man she didn't know, when right in front of her was the man she wanted to give it all.

(*Ch or Ch* 2000: 71)

The central point is, thus, the way the individual takes the existing ideological standpoint in the community and constructs his sexual identity.

When he placed the ring on her finger, so gentle and it fit perfectly, unlike the way Naina was feeling inside. When he touched her –maybe just a small invasion of her space, but it felt more like a full-blown attack –it didn't feel even slightly special or right. But when Dave held her hand and touched her, there was no voice in her head saying 'I wish you would stop, 'like there was with Armin, more like 'carry on, show me what you're good at.'

(*Ch or Ch* 2000: 357)

This idea of repression and re-definition of one's own identity shaped by natural and external circumstances is taken again in Nisha's third novel, *Passion and Poppadoms* (2004) and is not considered in her fifth novel *Bindis and Brides* (2005). Having reached this point the reader should consider that in spite of the unequal presence of the topic in the different novels the significance of the issue by the author is crucial. Therefore the explicit reference to sex, desire and, with them fantasies and dreams, was barely inexistent both in female writers born and bred in India and the new stream of British-Asian female writers.

Indian women were known to faint in India – when their husbands made a cup of tea, or washed the dishes, it was a great way to show their surprise. Marina wondered if Thomas himself had fainted himself when he read the

passage that began: *My body is a temple, my mind an open fire, now get your clothes off, Thomas Harding, and fill me with desire.*

(PandP 2004: 367)

Marina's vision of Thomas gradually develops into what could be regarded as the relationship between desire and the desiring subject, always a bit beyond the moral domain. In fact, she begins to experience not only the normal changes in a girl's attraction for a boy but also to a white man, something not suitable for an Indian girl. Not being able to stop thinking of him, it is said it

[...] *must* be the sign (…), the thoughts of lying in bed with Thomas were sucking her in. Mentally, she apologised to her dead gran for such a wickedly sexual vision.

(P and P 2004: 129)

As can be seen in these passages, the books become an indirect conduct book for British-Asian girls. It is not expected for them to behave in a particular way as regards sex and desire -not even today. On Thomas' visit to Marina's house,

God, what must Thomas think of a grown woman having a poster of him on the wall? What must he have concluded when he read four thousand words of sexual fantasies about him? Indian girls didn't do this sort of thing, they were supposed to have fantasies about blending spices, not about being spicy with men. It was time to submerge. To the depths of the sea of Embarrassment. Oh, Shiva, is there nothing you can do?

(P and P 2004: 345)

She could not stop the feeling of shame derived from Thomas' notice of a poster of him in Marina's bedroom. It is after this that the prejudices of cultures mixing will increase. Whereas English women can enjoy a freer sexuality, Indian women are not expected to have sexual fantasies as a direct consequence of the strictness of a patriarchal society. Furthermore they are aware of their degradation as individuals. In this context of sexual oppression and the natural desire for sexual relationships will make them create other ways to express themselves sexually; in this case, the externalization in written

words of actions she cannot achieve physically and as part of the formation of a new femininity. It shows the way she is moved, even dominated by such forces in spite of being aware of all the prohibitions. As considered by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (quoted in Foucault 1987) “natural desire only consists in satisfying needs” and this quotation of Nisha Minhas’ words is a perfect example of it. The evolution from fear and embarrassment to happiness and not caring about her relatives’ beliefs are seen in the reassurance of her words:

To stop and wonder what her relatives would think, to worry whether she was good enough for Thomas, to question herself how far she would take this kiss if given the chance, would be bowing down to her insecurity. This was her life and if it flowed one way towards happiness –then why paddle upstream?

(*P and P* 2004: 372)

Rather than being surrounded by further insecurity, her decision to follow her own path will reach a successful end in favour of love. The last sentence of the book, concerning Marina and Thomas’ visit to India, cannot be more significant as to the breaking of the sexual code of behaviour by British-Asian girls, “Holding hands in India was treated the same way as a couple having sex in public”, a regulation that takes us back and interconnects with the loss of desire and romance in India considered by Kareena in *Saris and Sins* (2003).

She had wondered when in India’s history women and men had lost their desire for romance. Where had the thousands of years hidden the pleasures of true love? The lost treasures of India.

(*S and S* 2003: 155)

Desire and its actual expression are framed by both power and law. Not only do they both respond to a code that has been restricted and penalised if it did not conform to law but also where there is desire, the power relation is already present (Foucault 1987: 81).

Above I highlighted the initiation of Indian women into sex prior to marriage as well as the fear for the first night shared with a stranger in the earlier novels. Nevertheless, Zarleena's experience with Joel not only" brought some sort of closure to her relationship with Armin" (*B and B* 2005: 238) but, contrary to other girls who would like to "wipe their minds clear" (*B and B* 2005: 239) as opposed to India where "INDIAN GIRL SLEEPS WITH WHITE MAN" (*B and B* 2005: 329) would have hit the front page.

[When Joel began to touch her] What could be simpler than animal attraction? It defied rules imposed by different cultures. It ignored race, creed, sex, caste, colour. Zarleena's and Joel's family roots might be poles apart, but their magnetism was strong. And other people's opinions mattered as little as iron filings when it came to love.

(*B and B* 2005: 306)

While British-Asian girls are demanding a freedom of personal sexual conduct distinct from the code dictated by tradition in all its spheres, the extreme, as represented by some English women, especially the stereotype of Essex girls, is maintained in the hard belief in the easiness of the latter to find a new man without any kind of moral consideration, morality being observed as the maintenance of the individual's dignity. Therefore, not being concerned about culture or dignity limitations they have gone through more marriages than anybody can think of, mainly Indian women for whom divorce is thought of as an atrocity,

And some of the English women seemed a little far-fetched. Take Essex girls, for example. She couldn't get her head around his explanation for an Essex girl; surely women couldn't be that loose and badly behaved, could they? But the stories got worse (or better, depending on which way you were looking at them). Apparently some extra-loose Essex women have been married over ten times before they've even reached puberty. And she had to ask Cory to repeat the story about how any half-decent man could just walk into any nightclub in Southend and take his pick of the Essex Girls who were always on offer.

(*TDH* 2007: 33-4)

This passage reproduces the other extreme to Indian culture as regards behaviour with men, the conception of marriage and the easy disposal of women. Unlike Essex girls, Indian women can only marry once and they are traditionally kept at home. But nonetheless there are similarities because of the number of women on offer and the concept of marriage as a market where women are prepared to be the one chosen by a good husband-to be from birth, their families strive to educate them in the Indian way not only in behavior and manners but also to achieve the desired physical appearance. They are trained to become good role models that do not let either the family or the Indian community down.

4.2.9 Religion

According to the British government statistics in a survey for the Census April 2001 by religion, Hindus are the second largest non-Christian religious group, after the Muslims. There were over half a million Hindus (558,000), comprising 1 per cent of the total population and 18 per cent of the non-Christian religious population. There are just over a third of a million Sikhs (336,000), making up 0.6 per cent of the total population and 11 per cent of the non-Christian religious population. If for the first generations and the relatives in India religion represents the pillar on which to base and to justify their beliefs, for the second generation it becomes the source for an apparent moral support as in Marina's feeling of guilt "about the way she used her god [Shiva]. Only calling upon him when in times of need and strife" (*P and P* 2004: 400). As Authoress (Gill 1995:15) states religion and society are inseparable.

I mentioned the strategic role played by religion in *Saris and Sins* (2003) and *Passion and Poppadoms* (2004). Therefore, apart from being a key factor in interpersonal relations, it adopts a defensive role through which some characters try to justify their ideologically wrong actions and validate a gender identity linked to apparent religious beliefs. While his wife Kareena initiates a searching process on the awareness of his infidelity that gives evidence of her discovery, her husband's friend Gilbert's refers to him as a sick Sikh for his lack of obedience and the creation of tense relationships and causing

harm to people around him. The use of religion to support his words in accordance with his assertion that he is following the right behaviour of a true Sikh and his wife's improper conduct for showing a lack of trust in the couple adds another element to the divisions that result from the imposition of cultural and social values. To his wife's question about the last time he spoke to his lover, Cloey,

'Are you just trying to hurt me, Kareena? We sorted this out last night. Over and over and over, I told you, and you promised me, you promised me that you believed me. What do you want me to do? Invent a fucking time machine and take you back with me? I'm telling the bloody truth. A true Sikh does not lie.' He was seething. 'Will you just believe me? Sometimes I wish I had slept with her, then I least I would deserve this torment you're inflicting on me. I'm your husband, Kareena, Please please, please treat me like one.' (…)
'I've nothing to say, except that my wife obviously takes the words of a mad woman over mine. No trust in our marriage. That's what's missing between us. No trust. 'His words had that spider-trying-to-crawl-up-a-waxy-surface feel about it. Desperate, and hopeless. 'I forbid you to open it.'(…)
'I'm a Sikh.'

(*S and S* 2003: 415-416)

By using religion to hide his lies he is being extremely deceitful because as a Sikh, he is not allowed to initiate a sentimental relationship with a woman from another culture, as a married Sikh to keep a lover he would have to "trade in" his religion, an idea that reminds the reader of the conception of the woman as a selling product as maintained in section 2.1.3.1.2. It is in this discussion that he defends his religious identity:

It's bad you've done all this, 'she began, watching him staring into space, 'but using our religion as a ticket to weasel yourself out is the pits.
My Sikhism is my blood. I would never trade it for a quick shag with a white woman. That's what you said, wasn't it?

(*S and S* 2003: 417)

This attitude is opposed to his final decision to tell Kareena all the truth. Thus the liar using the name of religion turns into 'The sorriest Sikh' (*S and S* 2003: 418), whose

forgiveness is accomplished. Notwithstanding such forgiveness does not correspond to Kareena's natural reactions but to the consciousness if she did not forgive him, her parents would look for another husband and her situation as an Indian woman would worsen.

Indian girls were like cars, perfect when brand new, but their value depreciated after they'd had one owner. Second-hand Indian girls are hard to shift. You never knew if the prior owner had been thrashing her too hard. A re-stitched hymen is not quite the same as a reconditioned engine. Kareena knew she would probably end up marrying a divorced man. And it would beg the question: why was he divorced?

(S and S 2003: 419)

The husband's power over the wife redirects Kareena's words and her sense of guilt makes Kareena forget her religion and consider Lévis-Strauss' study of women as an element of cultural exchange once more.

The weight of religion as a strategic weapon as used above is approached from another perspective in a book published a year later. Following her grandmother's advice, Marina, the main female character, drops sacred water from the Ganges over Thomas' head to marry him. She defines Shiva as 'her private Hindu God. The God who chose her to choose him' (*P and P 2004:82*); aimed at the justification of the actions. He

[...] had to act on impulse in the present and arrange Thomas' path to cross with Marina's right now. Let's say that Shiva picked the place and Shiva picked the time and Shiva, in all his wisdom, in all his goodness, was now picking her man. Marina smiled at the thought, Shiva had taste.

(P and P 2004: 86)

She even thought about the possibility of her god making it possible for Thomas and Nicole to split. In fact, 'Shiva had given the green Light. And who was she to disobey Shiva?' (*P and P 2004: 86*). This stands as a perfect example of hypocrisy and self-interest, which seems to account for the current role that she wanted the Hindu deity to play.

In a book published the same year, Sushi, the main character in *The Pocket Guide To Being An Indian Girl* (2004) is accused of “behaving like some *lafangi* without moral upbringing” (TPG 2004: 227) and of bringing shame on the family. In Sikhism, moral life does not depend on a code but on a spiritual quest that involves strict discipline, a discipline that does not become a creed in the character’s process of self development and that fails to accomplish some key issues in Sikh philosophy. Thus the objective of any Sikh is his union with God. If such an aim does not come to an end a person fails in his cycle of birth and rebirth as he is responsible for his actions. It also considers that the human mind is in a chaotic state and they punish the five vices: lust, anger, greed, attachment and pride or ego. Discipline is vital for the achievement of purity. The Gurmat, Guru’s teaching, clarifies the purpose of life (Sikh missionary centre 1991: 253) as follows:

This time having born as human being
This is thy turn to meet the Supreme Lord.
Thy other activities will be of no avail at the end,
Seek the company of the holy men
And only contemplate on God.
Set thy mind on crossing the sea of life,
For life is being wasted away
In pursuits of pleasures of the World.

(Asa Mohalla 5, p-12)

After her obligations as a mother are fulfilled, her decision to stay in Rishikesh to do a course run by Swamiji and have an experience which will allow her to search for moral guidance brings the peace of mind she was in need of. Thus, and contrary to Sushi’s case,

In ourselves alone is peace. Even when we know how difficult it is to change ourselves, still we expect others to change, and are unhappy when our expectations are not met.

(AMM 2003: 83)

However, in spite of Hemant's defence of the naturalness of religion, in Astha's opinion, "It is not, said Astha indignantly, only when they have no choices' (AMW 2003: 89). In one of Astha's visits to the ashram, a community formed with the intention of being spiritually uplifting for its members, often headed by a religious leader or mystic, her mother read some of the notes from Swamiji's lectures. In ancient India, in a Hindu hermitage where sages lived in peace and tranquillity amidst nature.

Sleep, the state of being most pure. In sleep there is no thought, no emotion, no subject, no object. Sleep is the state where there is no 'I'. The state in itself no different from death, or previous lives in which we are in identical status - we need sleep not only to survive (you can't be awake if there is no sleep) but in order to understand reality).

(AMW 2003:92)

From here derives the significance of religion as one of the main concepts in the definition of the person's identity and his/her roots.

4.2.10 *Tell me Shiva, is racism a disease for the naïve?* (P and P 2005)

In the introductory notes to the present study it was argued that multiculturalism entails not only an ambiguous and paradoxical move towards modernization but also the occultation of social problems such as racism. Its representation in the literature that concerns us here is addressed in different ways. Thus it is still portrayed in daily life (see Mahal 2004), and within this, work (see Syal 1999), social class clash (see Minhas 2004), mother-daughter relationships, prejudices and lack of knowledge regarding the different communities (see Mahal 2004). In the following sections I will go through the different examples set above so as to analyse its portrayal in the contemporary literature that concerns us here and that shows the fact that some British-Asian citizens are still the victims of racial mistreatment and the harshness of a negotiation regarding the traditional discourse of racism.

An innocent action like watching a crowd whose team had won turns into one of the clearest examples of racism. Thus, after being called Pakee by one of the football supporters and her reaction to her words “Sellotape can’t solve everything, you Pakee, you toupee-wearing turd” (TPG 2004: 101), Sushi creates two new rules to add to the long list of rules made by Sushi in order to find a meaning to her existence.

- Rule No 20 is: Don’t stare out at football crowds walking past your window and
- Rule No 21- Don’t expect sympathy from your mum when you get called Pakee, she’ll say it’s your own fault -you got called one in the first place.

(TPG 2004: 102)

This passage stands not only as an illustration of the persistence of the conscious division between us and them but also as the crude reality of lots of individuals that apart from being the target of racism also have to face an unjustified sense of guilt caused by a direct member of the family. Her feeling of anger raises and opens the way to the possibility of challenging racist language. Such use of racist abuse would enter into the “kind of knowledge grounded on experience which remains in the community and which is not expressed in academic discourse” as reckoned by Cameron et al. (1992: 118) in her study of black history and ethnic identity in relation to language and the use of the term ‘Pakee’ would stand as part of the “process of constituting categories and identities” (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1995: 478). Over the last years in some parts of Britain this word is being replaced by ‘Kosovan’, “more likely to be shouted in the street than the word Paki, even when the accused is Portuguese” according to the article by Benedictus (*The Guardian* 23.01.06)

4.2.10.1 *Climbing the ladder: the genuine article*

As Fairclough (1989: 116) points out, a text choice of wording depends on, and helps create, social relationships between participants. The use of racist vocabulary has experiential value in terms of a racist representation of a particular ethnic grouping but its

use and the failure to avoid it may also have relational value, perhaps assuming that racist ideology is common ground for the speaker and other participants. I have already pointed out the difficulties that minority group members encounter when they try to find their place in a foreign country. One of the main tasks to be achieved is to put an end to any existing prejudice. However, that task cannot be easily accomplished due to everyday racism all around. As indicated in the quotation below, in a job interview one thing is what the employee wants to hear and another what minority groups feel they should say. In Tania's case,

When I get asked about racism, as I always do in any job interview when they're checking whether I'm the genuine article (oppressed Asian woman who has suffered), as opposed to the pretend coconut (white on the inside, brown on the outside, too well off and well spoken to be considered truly ethnic) I make up stories about skinheads and shit through letterboxes, because that's the kind of racism they want to hear about. It lets my nice interviewer off the hook, it confirms that the real baddies live far away from a safe distance. I never tell them about the stares and whimpers and the anonymous gobs of phlegm at the bus stops.

(LHH 1999: 144)

Consequently, Tania uses her power as a speaker to reconduct the conversation while dealing with the topic at hand. Through a strategic use of racism, she does not talk about the current situation of Asian people as it is but as white people want it to be. At the same time, she uses two expressions, *genuine article* and *pretend coconut*, to refer to herself. As a consequence, her identity is now expressed in material terms. Through the use of adjectives such as *genuine* and *pretend*, that is, fake, not authentic, her identity is diluted and subject to the supposed and useless effort of Asian people to define themselves in terms of or directly associated with white people. In the first case, *genuine article*, points to oppressed Asian women and the specificity of gender, woman not man; in *pretend coconut*, both genders, the masculine and feminine, are put together without difference. They both stand as further examples of the attempt to constitute identities illustrated in the previous section. With the use of the qualifiers we are not only labelling and judging people but also challenging them.

The power of work over race constitutes an attempt to break with existing stereotypes and the difficulty of being yourself without continually having to remember your race. No matter how the individual is it is worthless to be continually reminded of your origins. You may use it as a strategy to find a place in the media; in this case, as part of the market demands. Nevertheless when that space is occupied the immediate reaction is to distance yourself from it. As Tania states in a conversation with Martin about the relevance of one's origins and the link among your present-past-future, Tania emphasises the power of artistry over race. From her perspective, in order to become part of the mainstream, she should not need to focus on Asian concerns. Conversely, people should judge her work for her work's sake regardless of her ethnicity. Whereas she rejects her roots, Mark encourages her to recognise them. Her attempt to distance herself from race prejudices becomes a battlefield in her professional relationship with Mark. As she states in a conversation with Mark, a film director, on her documentary on the problems of the Asian community,

I'm a director first, an Asian second. I care about my audience's IQ, not their race, Your talent is your calling card. No one calls Woody Allen a Jewish film maker any more.

(LHH 1999: 250)

This modified discourse of identity contradicts Indian culture for which your community and roots go before your professional choice. While the white community admires the documentary as being genuine, the Asian community despises it because they believe their problems only concern themselves and nobody else.

4.2.10.2 *Unfounded judgements: Thomas wasn't racist, just ignorant (P and P 2004: 421)*

Racism is not only considered from the point of view of the white community as highlighted above but also from a section of the Indian community. Therefore they believe themselves to be in possession of the truth and the right to judge the others on behalf of their gender, chauvinism and the false belief that by criticising their peers their old values can be maintained. This discourse of racism can be exemplified with the misconception

concerning the role of women and as a support of the thesis that the majority of opposition to minority groups is socially and culturally generated (see section 2.1.7):

Oi, you should be ashamed of yourself. You should be at home cooking samosas for us men (...) How dare these Asian men judge her just because they had the same colour skin? What did they know of her life? Nothing.

(*P and P* 2004: 18-19)

This devaluation of your community, the group you are supposed to defend and protect leads to the attempt to find an unjustifiable explanation of the white community's hatred of the Asian community:

Racism: a disease for the naive. Racists: experts in the art of nicknaming. Shallow, deprived people who would gladly let an Indian doctor save their child, but they wouldn't want their child mixing with one. Gladly eat Indian food at Indian restaurants while tipping only expletives with their forked tongue, mumbling 'Paki' behind the waiter's back, then tucking into their Chicken Tikka Masala with an attitude pickling in its own false sense of superiority.

(*P and P* 2004: 293-294)

The passage combines the superficiality of ethnic human relationships and an everlasting code of conduct in the background. As derived from this quote, ethnic relations are marked by binary oppositions that portray conscious race superiority, a lack of effort and interest to actually know the Indian community and the ignorance in the maintenance of the superficiality of anything Indian, except for the scale of human relations leading to the cooperation of the races. Racists can eat Indian food while insulting the community and their son's doctor can be Indian, but the relationship with a member of the Indian community is far from acceptance.

The ignorance and hypocrisy in any racial act portrayed in anti-immigration discourse and the impossibility of multiculturalism due to an unjustified racism can be

observed in the passages below. On the entrance to Mr and Mrs Cotton's shop could Zarleena read the following sign on the till, to her astonishment as she never thought of them as racists,

*ON LY TWO FOREIGNERS AT A
TIME. (INDIANS, PAKISTANIS
AND SRI LANKANS). DUE TO
FOREINERS SHOPLIFTING*

(*B and B* 2005: 431)

The term foreigners is not applied to anyone in general but clearly addressed to people from the Indian subcontinent. Such discourse hides the difficulty in the recognition of the white community's actions and faults. Given the sign above the immediate reaction on Honey and Shimla's side was to design a sign in retaliation:

*TO OUR LOCAL CUSTOMERS. THE NEWSAGENTS
NEXT DOOR ARE RACISTS. BOYCOTT THEIR SHOP
OR EAT SWEETS STICKY WITH XENOPHOBIA AND
DRINK POP FIZZY WITH BIGOTRY. THANK YOU.*

(*B and B* 2005: 435)

It illustrates the resistance to racism by the younger British-Asian generations and a gradual change from the 'passive Asian' stereotype (Burdsey 2006: 15).

I have already mentioned the difficulty of the relationship between Thomas and Marina because of the impossibility of cultures mixing. In this context, the message behind this ideology was the racist character of Thomas, a member of the upper class who would never have sexual relationships with Indian girls but a racism that could also be approached in economic terms,

He's a racist, Marina. An upper-class, toffee-nosed, stuck-up, la-di-da, hoity-toity, still living in the past racist.

(*P and P* 2006: 219)

The only solution was understanding. Saffron, of Indian birth but adopted by English parents, blames them for her lack of knowledge of India. This fact complicates the parent –daughter relationship. This tension is sorted after her visit to India to get to know her roots. On her realization that she cannot identify with this country and that she belongs to Britain her perspective of racism becomes even more significant. As she maintained,

There was only one plague. The cure was a simple one called ‘understanding’. (...) But sometimes, as Saffron well knew, it wasn’t always about understanding, more about misconception. People, by their very nature, make assumptions based on past experiences or on teachings. They’re conditioned to follow certain patterns of thought.

(TDH 2007: 325)

One of the established patterns of thought and past experiences dictates that white parents do not have brown children. Her British upbringing makes her live life more naturally and approach human beings as such rather than with unfair judgements based on colour or race. Being fully aware that her colour of skin does not make her Indian after her visit to real India, her actions and behaviour are in tune with the British. It is indeed this Britishness that creates tense relationships with some Indian girls. Their attitude to life, a life with codified and established norms of conduct and their culture restrictions mark the lack of understanding shown by the Indian girls.

The instances gathered above do not correspond to the international scope, which is a characteristic of London, a city identified with multiculturalism and in which, although apparently, the government seems to hide the existing social and cultural differences. It has already been pointed out that Blair’s government tried to foster multiculturalism. Nevertheless the social and cultural problems are still part of daily life and there seems to be no easy solution to it. In Saffron’s words

One would have thought that people living in London, the multicultural capital of the world, would have a better tolerance of different races, cultures, traditions and nationalities. One would have thought that if someone lived in

the melting pot of a large city, that someone would have at least dipped their toe in the mix to see what the temperature was like.

‘You’re just a pathetic, horrible racist,’ Saffron said.

(TDH 2007: 325)

The accusation as a racist, denied in terms of his residence at the centre of Yid town opposes the the strategic nature of racist labelling reflected in his words as “Hey, you Brown Muffin” (TDH 2007: 326).

In the quotation above multiculturalism is applied to London. More recently, a supplement published by *The Guardian* (23.01.2006) applied it to Britain and recognised that despite the experience of immigrants since the 50s and the characteristics of the new immigration boom with the arrival of Poles, Portuguese, Italians, Filipinos, Lithuanians, East Europeans and Kurds to local areas of Britain, asylum seekers and refugees mostly, “Britain today is one of the most tolerant and multicultural societies there has ever been – in fact it is the country’s multiculturalism that is making it more tolerant.”

4.2.11 The role concerns among the British Asian community

The novelists in this thesis challenge the stereotypes indicated in Chapter 2 in different ways. The submissiveness and the unquestioning obedience, the passivity of a woman is seriously questioned when they present women in their public and private behaviour, as protesters and idealists and under the influence of Western and urban values (Alphonse 1997: 86). The women, and I add nothing new to the topic, who rebel against the social structure and male-dominated society are in direct contrast to the predominant stereotype. There are two groups of women in this category who seek liberation: the women who seek liberation but finally give up and reconcile themselves to the status quo; the women who make their own independent decisions and assert their individualities (*ibid* 88). As can be read:

Many Indian women subconsciously equate marriage and partnership with trial and suffering. Indeed, they expect it; welcome it as a proof of a virtuous liaison, blessed by tradition. Stoicism in the face of extreme pain is expected of the good wife (a belief possibly reinforced by the resignation and fatalism displayed by the mother or other close female relatives). Surrounded by forceful female role models, loving harmonious parental examples, the myth will be challenged and replaced perhaps with other powerful Kali-centred female models (particularly prevalent in the South of India where matriarchal familial structures still persist). Left unchallenged, indeed challenged by dominant male partners, Sita will encourage masochism, martyrdom and the subjugation of self.

(LHH 1999: 211)

Such a text puzzled Akkash – it was not the sort of book to be read by a woman who, as he indicates, “shimmyed out of the door in a silver handkerchief singing to the world she was randy” (LHH 1999: 211). Indian women are moved by two contradictory forces; one leading to submission and the other to destruction, and consequently to the violation of the Indian way. The new model of femininity defended in this thesis in the metaphor of conduct books does not encourage, unlike Sita, masochism, martyrdom and the subjugation of self. Thus, the traditional role of the wife is redefined for freedom and personality’s sake not in terms of slavery to the husband and the reduction to the household chores. All this will also derive in a new definition of the mother –daughter relationship. Similarly, the later novels still show the submissiveness mentioned above. Sushi, the female character in *The Pocket Guide To Being An Indian Girl* (2004) tries to break rule number 19 in her guide to life,

Rule No 19: Never, ever be nice to a guy. We girls have a Mary-Poppins-meets Submissive-Gal character stereotype to assassinate. I mean, if I hadn’t said thank you in such a grateful, pauper-like way, I bet he’d have come chasing me to ask if I’d got over my ordeal and whether he could offer more assistance to ensure my full recuperation?

(TPG 2004: 98-99)

He does not seem the least bothered in her words. Her attempt to show good manners fails and mirrors gender difference once more. In the new literature the main female roles are still ascribed to the mother, wife and the mistress - seductress. Whereas the role of the latter is not prevalent, the first one is still highly dependent on tradition and the second one and the wife-to-be are questioning the traditional attitude of their mother and reacting against it bringing a renegotiation of the traditional message and reaching a consensus with their ancestors.

4.2.11.1 Mother: The heavy burden of tradition

As has been stated above, gender roles are highly defined. The role of the mother is considered not only as the progenitor but also in a protective and possessive way. While the father represents authority, the mother is the centre of domestic life and motherhood leads to self-assertion. For Nice (1992: 54) “the major role of the father is to enable the infant to move out of the oneness with mother into the outside world.”

Traditionally speaking, women have been confined to the domestic sphere although their obedience, duty and passive attitude are put into question under the influence of Western values in both the public and the private environments. Despite this, the model of the mother who teaches her daughter to conform to the Indian code is once more taken to the extreme in some of the literature under study:

This was getting repetitive. For the month leading up to the wedding, her mother had drilled the rules into her. Kareena sighed, ‘I must keep my head covered when his parents are present. I must never ask questions. I must answer all questions politely. Never smile unless smiled upon’. ‘She paused, trying to think of the most important must. ‘Er...oh yeah, I must always oblige’. Kareena felt her face flush. “I must always satisfy Samir in the...bedroom.”

‘And have you?’

‘I haven’t said no’.

(*S and S* 2003: 101-102)

As can be observed in this quotation, the characters are “caught between their need to conform to the given roles and the urge to seek freedom from them” in Prek’s words (1989: 40) and the old values are repeated continuously in a process that could be labelled as “culture under transition” (*ibid* 40). It could even be considered a representation of the relationship between the problematizer and the problematizee identified by Ochs and Taylor (1992), which in our case would be represented by the mother and the daughter respectively. Therefore not only does the listener question the speaker’s behaviour and criticises her reaction against her cultural expectations but she also considers herself to be in possession of the necessary authority to judge her. Even the use of dots constitutes another instance of the inner battle of the young Indian woman in her effort to satisfy her family (contrary to her own beliefs).

With these words the problematizer leads to more opposition between the conversants and stands as an example of the mother’s role as the main subject in the maintenance of the family honour and the good behaviour of the women. In order not to be punished or blamed for the loss of the family honour she has to act according to her socially defined role as a mother. “A mother knows what her daughter’s life will be like as a married woman, and it is her duty to prepare her for it” (Brown et al.1985: 132). Take an example of this in Susham’s mother in *The Pocket Guide To Being An Indian Girl* (2004) without forgetting the high level of irony hidden in the book.

5- Mum, I don’t want to be like you. Rule Number 5 Your mother is another human being who is better than you’ll ever be, and don’t forget it, ‘cos she won’t. She has power. You haven’t.

(TPH 2004: 18)

This rule makes the distinction of power clearer. In family interaction “gender identity is negotiated along the dual, paradoxically related dimensions of power and connection.” (Holmes and Meyerhoff 2003: 179) and power is considered here as the capacity of the individual to achieve his or her aims. Besides, conflict always happens in the power dimension of relationship. Traditionally girls have been closer to their mother “because the daughter never experiences ‘oneness’ with the mother. She cannot successfully separate, but is continuously returning to the mother to get her earliest

dependency needs met” (Nice 1992: 52). This power relationship is extended to adulthood. Thus, Kully’s desire not to marry as “she’d always dreamt of the most perfect wedding taking place on Valentine’s day” (*TPG* 2004: 160), served Sushi as the ironical expression of power not only with mothers but also with adults in general.

Valentine’s Day, like Christmas, is a let-down. Be aware that grown-ups do that sometimes: make you believe in things they don’t believe in themselves –it’s their way of asserting power.

(*TPG* 2004: 161)

The mother-daughter relationship is polarised by the mother’s insistence and the daughter’s resistance. Not only does the latter lack power but also their rights and knowledge are denied. Thus they may demand their own territory not by devaluing their parents but by defending their needs and aspirations. Having reached this point it is important to remember the controversial relationship between Sushi in *The Pocket Guide To Being An Indian Girl* (2004) and her mother in both personal and cultural terms. She does not want to make the same choices her mother made; she does not even seem to want to make them although differently mainly because she sees herself as different from her mother; even the way the members of her community have been educated. Their relationship could be defined as “natural enemies”⁹ (Nice 1992: 107), a term that refers to the complex natural differences between the two members under study. In the passage below, Zarleena’s complaint about her husband not doing the washing up develops into an argument with her mother. According to her mother she should not complain about it as Zarleena, as a wife, should do it for her husband. It stands as the everlasting submission of the wives to their husbands in the preservation of an old code of conduct. As her mother maintains,

‘Ditch those ideas immediately’, her mother began. ‘Your job as his wife is to look after him, not to be slovenly and not to take short-cuts...’Not to...blah, blah, blah.

(*S and S* 2003: 336-337)

⁹ Further reading Miller (1978).

Her mother lectured from the head not the heart, as the master, not the mother, a role traditionally associated with the father. The rules for an Indian woman have been dictated down the corridors of time and it was not for the young Indian woman of today to start editing them. Her life was partly her own but mainly governed by her husband.

Her mother was saying, 'The last thing we want is for Samir to tell his mother how sloppy you are and for her to ring me up and tell me they have made a bad choice for their son'. She paused, and went on sharply. 'We made you a good choice in Samir, don't let him or us down,' she softened slightly. 'And don't let yourself down'.

(*S and S* 2003: 336-337)

This passage serves to illustrate the mother's responsibility to teach the daughter a whole body of proper conduct in order not to let the family down and the importance of rules through time. The mother's role as domineering, imposing, traditionalist and more concerned about the Indian code rather than about her daughter's happiness and self-control still represents the general pattern in most of the mother characters. So she appears as a key figure in the transmission of a particular code, the code dictated by Indian culture,

It was never black and white with Indian parents. It was always brown. Do your best for the Indian way and it would do its best for you. Her mother was right, Samir was the best choice. This was only a basket of washing after all. 'I won't let it happen again. I won't let you down.'

(*S and S* 2003: 337)

Contrary to *Saris and Sins* (2003), in *Bindis and Brides* (2005), published two years later, their daughter's happiness is more important than the continuation of an arranged marriage as an institution. In the first place they look for a husband for her daughter by networking. The only reference to it as the means to find a prospective candidate appears in *Bindis and Brides* (2005). Contrary to today's trends in India where the individuals look for the future couple on the internet themselves (Weiser 2001, McKenna et al. 2002), in *Bindis and Brides* this function is accomplished by the parents

via a reliable source of information, “A friend of a friend of a cousin knew of him and everything about Armin seemed perfect” (*B and B* 2005: 97).

According to McKenna et al. (2002: 23), due to the anonymity of the Internet, men and women tend to reveal their personality to a stranger in a way that they may not reveal off line. This develops trust and strengthens the relationship which showed positive effects on the psychological well-being of the people involved. Furthermore, when Indians get to know each other via the Internet they are not involved in the other’s social circle and there is no fear of ridicule or embarrassment. As we have observed in this dissertation, although in the end a love story develops between a British Asian female and a white man, it takes a long time for the former to open up her personality and tell him her real story despite the psychological weight of it. Contrary to them getting to know a prospective partner on the Internet as above, the female characters are attentive to the social and cultural surrounding as their actions are controlled by the gaze of the elders. However, as we have seen, some of the characters do not conform to the traditional norms of behaviour.

Continuing with our object of study, Amir seemed perfect, he offered all the desirable qualities of a model Indian husband –to –be; social expectations, physical appearance, wealthy family and good reputation),

He was the correct age, caste, height, even his shade of skin was perfect (A light shade of caramel mixed with a nutty nutmeg. Quite in fashion at the time). And to top it off, his family were well thought of; they mixed in the right circles and chinked glasses with the right businessmen.

(*B and B* 2005: 97)

However, such perfection results in their daughter’s pain and misery. In contrast to the previous novel, where marriage had to be kept no matter what happened, now Zareena’s parents decide to do away with Indian traditions and leave their daughters free to choose their partner,

Hard as it was to toss away Indian tradition, harder still was it to visualize Zarleena kneeling on her kitchen floor begging Armin to stop kicking her.

(*B and B* 2005: 123)

So “In 2004, Zarleena became independent and she hadn’t looked back. Until now”. (*B and B* 2005: 123), where the short sentence at the end functions as an afterthought representing the character’s evolution. So even though her parents were willing to help their daughter and advise her, she

[...] decided that she should confront this on her own. If she didn’t stand up to Armin now, she never would.

(*B and B* 2005:123)

On the one hand, parents try to teach their children about the right thing to do, to “socialize” them in Blum-Kulka’s terminology (1997), and on the other, they try to enjoy their company. *The Pocket Guide To Being An Indian Girl* (2004) rounds off the difficult relationship between mother and daughter with the exposition of the rules related to the mother’s role:

17- Get used to parents dishing out punishment. It won’t end till you’re 70 or thereabouts.

(*TPH* 2004: 18)

After playing three-a-side, the realization of a mark on Sushi’s face led to an insult to her mother in the presence of some wedding guests which bring the following rules:

22- Do not swear at your Mum in front of other people. Even if it’s done accidentally, you’ll incur the wrath of the evil anti eye for many days to come, or at least until another scandal takes precedence.

(*TPG* 2004:104)

32- Always expect your mother to think the worst of you and expect your relations to argue with her.

(*TPG* 2004:179)

45- Get used to your parents never apologising. It's impossible for them to get it wrong.

(TPG 2004: 221)

All these rules concerning identity, friendship relationships and culture, increase the girl's rebellious spirit both as a teenager and as a member of the Sikh community, creating a greater cultural clash and increasing the personal battle between her own impulses and the social code. In Rule 32 the place of the adverb at the beginning marks resentment and the impossibility of having any choices except the mother's imposition in an ideology of mother power as regards personality. Contrary to rule 44,

I tried hard to remain true to Rule Number 4: Never, ever acknowledge your friends in front of your mum.

(TPG 2004: 221)

We cannot but emphasize the importance of the mother, who is given a very high status (ambivalence and duality), which is still a feature of current Indian society. The relationship between Sushi, the female protagonist in *The Pocket Guide To Being An Indian Girl* (2004), and her mother is also far from the usual warmth and intensity between mother and daughter. There is a continuous confrontation not only with her mother but also with her aunts, her mother's sisters and her own brother.

The Hindu boy tends to look for a woman like his mother. Regarding the origin of polarity, the psychologist Erik Erikson, considers that,

The mother must respond to each and, at the same time, to all, and thus can belong to the individual child only in fleeting moments and to nobody for good or for long. A tentative interpretation would suggest that the child feels guilty in a way largely known in the west...for the child wants the mother to himself, while she must spread her love (Erikson 1970: 42).

As has been pointed out, *Difficult Daughters* (1998) begins with "The only thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother" (DD 1998: 1), a key element in the female

character's search for freedom and autonomy. Contrary to her mother, Virmati did not want to restrict her life within the household and family. As Virmati says, "My relatives gave me one view of my mother, I wanted another" (DD 1998: 5). Thus, she adopted the role of a second mother. We are shown the picture of Kasturi as a woman "breeding like cats and dogs", sacrifice till being on the verge of death. Kasturi's life moves from looking after her mother to getting married; picture of the mother in favour of marriage to settle down. Until her marriage, the lack of it became an area of conflict. Kasturi had already had her,

Virmati has already missed too much school. Said the great-aunt (...) and once she finishes, it will be time to get married. Already people are asking.

(DD 1998: 23)

Although marrying is a daughter's right and parents' duty, Virmati fails in her duty and she will be punished some day, as she cannot escape her karma, Virmati (traditionalist mother and modern father) tries to escape her fate but she cannot in the end. She represents the traditional fate of Indian women and although not in her case, other options are also possible. However, such options are not easy. Virmati does not really succeed in her struggle to achieve her own independence in life. Partly, it was her fault as nobody forced her to marry who she did.

4.2.11.2 The wife

Like my mum's always said, Life isn't all ha ha hee hee, so if you know there's going to be a few tears, you might as well try and enjoy them.

(LHH 1999:27)

These words were uttered by Chila, a woman who not only puts the blame of the failure of her marriage on the lack of communication but whose new life begins with the birth of a child; a woman whose loneliness is coloured by attending a meeting on women raising

funds for Jasbinder Singh's legal fees, an Asian woman who after leaving her husband suffered the murder of her children (See section 4.1.6).

Chila's effort to become a good wife and a good mother, roles that normally overlap, as she believes her role is to be defined by the others, leads her to failure.

I always worried about what I was throwing away, all the rules my parents had given me I seemed to be chucking out of the window. Because a lot of the time, you don't know what you might need until it's too late.

(LHH 1999: 33)

Together with this, her opinion on girls in their thirties presents a combination of the modernity of the new times and a tradition that matches her parents' beliefs and that considers the impossibility of marriage at a late age,

They all got degrees and they all know exactly what they want in a bloke: he's got to respect their parents but also know his own mind, be modern enough to load the dishwasher and traditional enough to swear in Punjabi, earn at least fifty k a year and also know the value of a walk in the moonlight. Western enough to be trendy, Indian enough to be pukka¹⁰ (⋯) How choosy can they be at thirty-four? You can't arrange a marriage and then expect to find perfection.

(LHH 1999: 37)

The day the bride's father hands her over to her new husband, the bride is expected to keep him happy, no matter the cost, without a moan or back-chat. Consequently, the life of a married Indian woman can be summarised as,

By the time she reaches sixty—321,000 *chapattis*, 29,200 hours of washing up, 43,800 hours of cooking, 14,050 hours of sex, and five minutes of orgasm later—any dreams she had as a girl have been swallowed up by the years, any looks she had as a young woman have

¹⁰ The Word *Pukka* is used colloquially to describe something as “first class” or “absolutely genuine”.

been beaten back by grind. It's no wonder that on the day the women reach three score years, their haggard faces are tattooed with the message, HARD LIFE. Zarleena, Honey and Shimla had been plenty of tattoos over the last year.

(*B and B* 2005: 428)

A life metaphorically expressed through a Hindu symbol, the sari, which symbolically marks the territory from innocence and dreams to adulthood and the confrontation with a reality distant from the early days dream, a reality of submission to the husband and the household as represented in the following passage,

But a requirement written by history dictates when an Indian can wear one. Until you are married, the sari remains a romantic dream. But once you are married, (...) you could even wear one to clean the blinking floor.

(*S and S* 2003: 129)

This passage offers a perspective which is not far from the traditional value of the sari as an external representation of the feelings of the individual and as an indicator of origin, caste and status.

Sunita, one of Syal's characters and Ganga, the Professor's first wife in *Difficult Daughters*, stand as the perfect example of the role of the faithful and submissive wife who stays in her place. As Neera Desai (1978: 25) argues messages on women's inferiority were expanded through legends highlighting the self-sacrificing, self-effacing pure image of women. Within this framework, we cannot forget the defence of the woman's position in relation to her husband, seen as a god. Contrary to the norms dictated by tradition,

Shakuntala's [Virmati's progressive cousin] visit planted the seeds of aspiration in Virmati. It was possible to be something other than a wife.

(*DD* 1998: 19)

Within this framework, move beyond the perception of the husband as a god.

My wives now know what to expect from each other, continued Harish. Virmati looked at him. Normally he never referred to his 'wives'. She was the wife. Ganga was the pronoun. Was Harish actually equating both of them?

(DD 1998: 261)

In section 2.3.1 Ferguson (c1981) referred to the ridiculing role of a dominated wife. This role is contradicted by Astha and Hemant's situation. Their arguments become constant as they only talk about "the business, the house or Anuradha" (AMW 2003: 66) and not about themselves. However she ends up

[S]colding herself for being so demanding. Hemant was busy, Hemant was building their future, she had to be adjusting, that was what marriage was all about!

(AMW 2003: 67)

Therefore, the initial break towards freedom always ends in acceptance in her case. She realizes her husband's lack of understanding. "She had a good life, but it was good because nothing was questioned" (AMW 2003: 99). Contrary to this, the more involved she gets in the political and social life of the country, the more oppressive her traditional submissive and passive life becomes.

With Astha, Kapur creates a character that the reader can easily understand and sympathise with through the mirror of her consciousness. Every single detail of her personal evolution is clearly portrayed as reflected in the process of evolution with both her husband and lover. Being another candidate for an arranged marriage, the inner battle within herself can be matched to the female characters. Shortly before her marriage to Hemant her feelings come to the point of a supposed responsibility concerning her first boyfriend, Rohan, who left India to study in Oxford. Her doubts point to a key issue, sexuality,

Should she tell him about Rohan, but what to tell? That though she had kissed a boy, her hymen was intact? That he had broken her heart but she hoped to find happiness in marriage?

(AMW 2003: 35)

The move from what she initially thought to be a progressist husband after his stay in America and her rejection of dowry, to a really traditional one makes her wonder about her *supposed* happiness. In the beginning of her marriage she plays the role of the submissive and traditional wife and daughter-in-law to later become a woman who not only needed her job as a primary teacher but also her involvement in the social and political movements in her country after meeting Aijaz, a political activist in charge of a theatre group. After his death in a terrorist bomb explosion she comes close to Pipee, his wife, with whom she begins a love relationship. As a consequence of this relationship, everything around Astha changes,

All this made it difficult for her to focus on what was going on around her. She was able to forget she had another life when she was absorbed in her paintings or her children's homework, an echo of an earlier simplicity that now appeared to have some advantages.

(AMW 2003: 232)

It is also then that she is faced with the choice between her sense of duty and her personal inclinations. Is she able to choose between the two, husband and tradition or freedom and love?

As my wife, you think it proper to run around, abandoning home, leaving the children to the servants? Astha went into familiar distress. As his wife? Was that all she was?

(AMW 2003: 188)

Back in England, Zarleena, a traditional Indian woman, is proud of her skin, history and parents, whom she trusted on the choice of her husband-to-be. Despite the idea that

love would eventually blossom with marriage and his husband –to-be’s acceptance of her as a good Indian girl she is still uncertain of the foundations of this belief. This lack of trust derives from the evidence of failed marriages around her,

Was it because it took the ‘free’ out of freedom and replaced it with ‘thral’?
Thraldom. Slavery. Bondage. A life of subservience.

(*B and B* 2005: 165)

After the acceptance of her situation she questions the cause of her decision. Thus, was it that she did not want to split her family that she accomplished her parents’ wishes?

4.2.11.3 The mistress-seductress

To any Westerner the primary thought about the term ‘mistress –seductress’ is directly linked to infidelity, to the Eastern one, the Hindus in this case, it becomes tricky and as the Professor states in an argument with Virmati

Co-wives are part of our social traditions. If you refuse me, you will be changing nothing. I don’t live with her in any meaningful way.

(*DD* 1998: 122)

In his case, it is the result of being forced into marriage to a woman with whom he had nothing in common. However, the awareness of his social responsibility leads to the wedding postponement with Virmati. In cases of doubt and pain, Virmati comes to the conclusion that

[a] man who is already married and a traitor to his wife can never give happiness to any woman. He is a wordly person caught in his own desires.
Nothing solid.

(*DD* 1998: 93)

As to a member of a different culture, Martin and Tania's relationship stands as a symbol of the polarised role played by culture duality and distance understood in terms of lack of understanding combined with the need to feel close to a cultural and external element. As Tania states,

I love him intensively when he's asleep -big blonde giant, Viking of my heart -grateful that he is different enough to free me from my past. I can't tell him any of this when we are awake. He wouldn't understand. Sometimes, you just get weary with having to explain yourself all the time. And sometimes, the fact that he will never understand is perfect.

(LHH 1999: 153)

On the discovery of her husband's infidelity, and unlike traditional Indian women, she decides to confront the truth and adopt an active role. Nevertheless her mother reinforces her role as the transmitter of the traditional message and accentuates the behaviour that springs from gender polarization.

Kareena's mother always said that an Indian man holds his pride in his anger. An emotional energy converted to the physical. She said that an Indian woman shows her pride in her silence and lets her actions do the talking. But right now, as Kareena stared down at the thick book on her lap, this was not about actions doing the talking, this was about fingers doing the walking.

(S and S 2003: 327)

Her decision to take action leads her to obtain Cloey, her husband's lover's telephone number. It is on her husband becoming aware that his wife knows about his infidelity that he imagines the whole Indian community considering him as dead for his betrayal of the Indian code. It is not until this moment that he decides to give up his unfaithful relationship with the English woman. Instead of silence Kareena's response is fight against it, and consequently, against the established norms. Thus, rather than ignore her marital situation, she fights against ignorance. In Indian culture ignorance guarantees the continuation of the old norms, where respect for the institution prevails over the

individual's honour. She well knows that the Indian way has survived in time and place through the silencing of the women's suffering. Nevertheless, the time to change an Indian rule has come. It is time to change things and this change has to begin from within, with women in this case. In this context, the new model of femininity implies the transgression of not only this rule concerning the ignorance of unfaithfulness but of lots more rules as analysed in this thesis. In this process of redefinition of tradition, ignorance is converted into knowledge of the real situation of women and submission is converted into a respect for the individual and strength of the self.

Kareena's tears, however, were definitely for sadness. The rule for an Indian woman who finds out her husband is having an affair is to ignore it. But, (...) Kareena decided it was time to break an Indian rule. There was no way she could ignore this. Only a feeble, insecure woman with no confidence would be able to brush this under an Indian rug.

(*S and S* 2003: 366)

The female character shows an assertive and strong attitude about the right thing to do rather than submissiveness, which contributes to a lesser separation of roles in the expression of opinion or defence of her position as an expected respected wife. Therefore she defies the desired qualities of a woman. She is not supposed to be self –confident as self –confidence conveys the achievement of one's goals with means that do not always move in accordance with the prevailing ideology.

I do not regard this figure as a stereotype in the literature under study. The reasons for this statement are first and foremost that it is not a recurrent figure; second in the case of its existence it is forced by social and cultural motives given the impossibility of divorce or the lack of another option by British Asian citizens. In *Saris and Sins* (2003), the possession of a lover does not impede the completion with the Indian way. Thus, Samir's, the son of a strict Sikh family, responsibility towards his future wife and his parents is not free from false beliefs and a psychological battle hard to overcome. He is fully aware of the immediate consequence of his double life, disownment and the negation of his existence in the hands of the most important institution in India, the family.

[...] the symbolic burning of his birth certificate. In their eyes [his parents] from that moment on, it would be as though their son had never been born.

(*S and S* 2003: 16)

His only fault is his belief in Cloey's love, a woman that manages to bounce between Jordan and Samir making both of them think that she is crazy in love with them when she was hooked on Jordan's commitment to her and Samir's house (and security) in order to achieve her aims. While Jordan, an old boyfriend, hung on to his past, Samir hung on to the sex and excitement.

Similarly to Zarleena's disappointment in her husband, Cloey's false beliefs in Samir's actions prove futile. She believed that he would forget the Indian way and would be hers. She realizes that,

Genuine thoughts, however, are sometimes built on fragile foundations of wishful thinking. And now, Cloey's wishful thinking was crumbling before the mighty sword of truth: he'd been unfaithful to her.

(*S and S* 2003: 54)

This disappointment gains strength on Zarleena's discovery of Samir's whereabouts and his decision not to see Cloey again. Being unable to achieve her aims, her involvement with a desired divorce by Samir leads to further lies through a false pregnancy, physical abuses and a sarcasm that reaches its climax with the possibility of staying with Jordan despite him being a criminal with no money. In a nutshell and, as Samir stated, "Keeping their love a secret, he realised now, had been half their love" (*S and S* 2003: 324).

The fact that he and Cloey had kept their love secret meant that their love had not been real love and he was also surrounded by the false belief that love would grow as they spent more time together. Not only was Armin unfaithful to his wife, but Cloey was also unfaithful to him with Jordan and he threatens to tell Armin's wife; while Cloey invents a fictitious pregnancy.

The appearance in her life of Joel allows Zaleena find the confidence she always needed. It is him who helps her and whom she falls in love with. The more their relationship grows, the more her story with Armin finishes.

We were just kidding ourselves. We got in a rut and became used to each other like a million other couples. The reason we stayed together was fear of the future, fear of being alone. Too scared to make the break.

(*S and S* 2003: 326)

In film, on television, in the press and in most popular narratives, men are shown to be in control of the gaze, women are controlled by it. Men act; women are acted upon (Gramman 1988: 1). Chila's parents reasons for prospective candidates not wanting her as a wife were, "Didn't the boys nowadays expect smart yet domesticated women with both culinary skills and a PhD? (*LHH* 1999: 20)

In a conversationa about Tania and Deepak the following passage can be read,

Martin is cooking us a meal tonight (...) Deepak,

She's a good cook, "Tania said dismissively.

She's (Chila) a good woman "replied Deepak.

[Game begins through language]

Martin is brilliant at housework too. I mean he actually enjoys ironing. He finds clear bathrooms thrilling"

Does he wear a frilly apron when he's hoovering then? (...)

And Chila isn't one of those ladettes who thinks saying fuck a lot and downing pints means she's a feminist! (...)

Martin's one of those rare men who really likes women (...)

Chila's one of those rare women who enjoys being one. Even when she's wearing trousers. And she makes me horny as hell.

(*LHH* 1999: 135)

Tania talks about Chila in terms of patterns in agreement with social rules. Deepak talks about her as a human being. When she says "Martin is brilliant at housework too",

she is trying to achieve a humorous effect regarding a sphere traditionally dominated by women. Therefore, stereotypes are still shown in the issues of men's interests,

Some men have this ability when talking to women. Just waiting for the keywords like 'SEX', 'PINT', 'FOOTBALL', ignoring everything else with a clever look as if they are truly interested.

(*Ch or Ch* 2000: 1)

This passage stands as a sample of masculinity and aggressiveness, a discourse that plays an essential role in the formation of identity and that will shape the way women regard him.

On their first meeting in *The Pocket Guide To Being An Indian Girl* (2004) Sushi and Arjun's, an Indian friend she meets at school, conversation turns into a hard discussion and the adoption of a defensive attitude on Sushi's part regarding manners. The daily event of a man opening the door for a woman turns into an ironical discourse on gender roles. Thus while he tries to preserve the old manners she criticises him to the extent that the main female rights such as the right to vote have been denied to them in history. It is then when the question of manners arises.

'My Mum says if you ask a man to iron your clothes or fix a leak, they come up with a whole book of excuses. Instead they do real hard stuff like open your door or get you seated in a chair. Well, that sure makes a whole difference to our lives.'

'Look, if you're going to get crotchery just because a guy thought you special enough to open the door for you, well, forgive me but_'

'That door-opening thing may be manners and all, at the time women were having doors open for them weren't they being denied the right to vote? And isn't that bad manners?'

(*TPG* 2004: 33)

This example of metalanguage on a daily inoffensive act turns into a discussion on universal issues. Humanity has lived caught in between contradictory arguments. In her

necessity to find a meaning to her own self, she takes the issue of manners and the world's hypocrisy to the extreme through the adoption of a defensive attitude. Furthermore, one way to start changing the position and role of women is by bringing to the light and denounce the personal, social, political and cultural injustices. As a mode of example the right to vote mentioned above represents the woman's options on what they really wanted and not leave everything in the men's lives.

4.2.11.4 Exotic India

Until now I have reviewed the role models assigned to women and men in the primary bibliography following Ferguson's (c1981) taxonomy with an emphasis, for practical reasons, on the female characters. Nevertheless, I would like to include a characterisitic that has been used to define and classify Indian women, the idea of the exotic. The main reason for this is the appearance of the association of some characters with India, an image that still persists in current literature. It is noteworthy, though, that the female protagonists are fully aware of the lack of correspondence of the exotic with the real Indian people. Rather than being authentic, the idea of the exotic is subject to appropriation by external forces and a modelled artefact to fill in someone else's gap, the need for difference to complete the necessity for attraction for something foreign beyond national borders. The exaggeration of the exotic defended in the passage below creates two clearly distinguishible poles, one the macrocontext, a defender of the exotic, and the microcontext of the Indian household, where norms differ in a senseless world of paradoxes and dichotomies. As Anita, the daughter of the only Indian family in the English mining village of Tolington states,

But these occasional minor celebrities never struck me as real; they were someone else's version of Indian, far too exaggerated and exotic to be believable. Sometimes I wondered if the very act of shutting our front door transported us onto another planet, where non-related elders were called Aunties and Uncles and talked in rapid Punjabi, which their children understood but answered back in broad Black Country slang, where we ate

food with our fingers and discussed family feuds happening five thousand miles away, where manners were so courtly that a raised eyebrow could imply an insult.

(AM 1996: 165)

Her identity crisis is accentuated by the confusion caused by the image of India offered in history books; what she is told about India at school does not match reality. Thus, the exaggeration highlighted in the quotation above responds to the profile of stereotypes in terms of the attribution of specific qualities to a subordinated group and their exaggeration.

It is mainly in the film industry this Indo-chic exoticness finds its most frequent representation. In an interview for the e-magazine *Last Laugh* (2003), Meera Syal referred to the Newham Asian Women's Project and the kind of roles given to Asian actors. She stated that

Here was the real version of what women were doing, redefining their roles as females, wives, mothers, daughters, with bravery, commitment and often loads of laughs along the way.

The contrast between these women and the kind of women portrayed in many of the roles I was offered, was almost laughable – the meek subdued teenager escaping an arranged marriage, the subservient wife bewildered by her surroundings, the exotic princess pouting with Eastern promise. None of them reflected what I saw going on around me, or indeed the many women I had grown up with - funny, saucy, intelligent women who grabbed life with both hands. (Syal, *Last laugh* 2003)

Thus she recognises the appearance of more roles written for Asians on TV and in the theatre but criticises the lack of social quality, this idea of the exotic linked to the epic Indian literature.

Anita read about the sixties and realised no brown or black people appeared on TV or in the newspapers but for

[s]ome long-suffering actor in a gaudy costume with a goodnes-gracious-me accent. So Mr Templar, you speak fluent Hindustani too! But that won't stop me stealing the secret formula for my country from where I will soon rule the world! Heh heh heh....

(AM 1996: 165)

Together with the idea of the ridicule, the exotic becomes the passport to the intellectual circles. Tania's refusal of her origin creates two clear poles between the Indian community and the English. Being described by the Indian community as "an Armani -clad princess" (LHH 1999: 265) who no longer belongs, for the white community she is "exotic beauty, the desired other" Tofansuk (2007: 131). She is,

[...] dismissive of the beauty that was her passport out of East London and into cosmopolitan circles where she was now termed merely exotic.

(LHH 1999: 18)

The refusal of her origins opposes Mark and Martin, her boss and lover, respectively. For the former, her origins took her to where she is in the professional sphere. He wishes she would write a document on arranged marriages, an insight into ordinary people and the relationships among them. For the latter, his disappointment in the lack of her native culture hides a failed literary career he never managed to achieve.

Much later in time, Kiz, Sushi's sister in *The Pocket Guide To Being An Indian Girl* (2004), wants to become an Indian film actress or a *bhangra* star to Sushi's disbelief given Gurminder's words to her friend that she had the makings of a star. While her other sister was about to go through an arranged marriage, Kiz' desire to become an actress challenges the expectations of her as an Indian woman. However, Sushi's vision of the reality around her does not match a successful career for her sister. This links with the polarization between the individual's desires and the demands of a reality that cannot satisfy their needs. Over the last few years, though, the situation has begun to change with the proliferation of the Indian film industry but there is still a long way to go.

4.2.12 *The utopia of being a British Asian woman*

4.2.12.1 Duality

A quick approach to the significance of the book titles written by Nisha Minhas establishes a connection with the main topic that concerns us here, duality, and with this key issues of Indian tradition. While her first publication *Chapatti or Chips?* (2000), *chapatti* being the basis of nutrition in Northern India, together with dal (lentils) and vegetables, suggests an option, the next three *Saris and Sins* (2003), *Passion and Poppadoms* (2004) and *Bindis and Brides* (2005) exclude such an option offering the idea of combination through the mixture of elements from the two cultures, a union that because of their natures becomes problematic and, as analysed, unsettle human relationships. Although all include elements target of denunciation as analysed in the different sections of this thesis, *Saris and Sins* (2003) and *Passion and Poppadoms* (2004) bring together opposed elements according to the cultural canon. That is, the symbolic representation of a sari and its wearing as a metaphor of the traditional view of Indian women allows no place for sins, in this case, infidelity. Also, because of the cultural and traditional canon, Indian women are not in the position to feel any passion, and if so, it should be concerning a man of their community. Thus passion cannot mix with poppadoms, adscribed to the Indian sphere.

The Marriage Market (2006) suggests the conception of the woman as an element of exchange as outlined in this thesis and Minhas' latest publication, *Tall, Dark and Handsome* (2007), characteristics that, mainly dark, point to the colour of skin of Indian men and not white and which could be interpreted as a game about the prototype of the right desired Indian man to marry, as far as physical appearance is concerned. In fact through the books the colour of skin is continuously born in mind as a remembrance of the characters' origin. A traditional saying of a Gypsy fortune teller, not Indian, to a young lady is –you will meet a tall dark handsome stranger- and refers to hair and eyes more than skin.

The psychological struggle the female characters have to overcome has been outlined in the different sections countless of times for its signifiacnce and complexity. Under the existing circumstances, challenge is an option which can be understood in different ways. Thus, the break with tradition can be subject to what direction the individual decides to take from the beginning of their existence. This is framed within the portrayal of culture as a “movable feast” (*LHH* 1999: 148) where the characters react to the situation with different strategies. As Tania states,

Unlike Sunita, I don't just wave the placards and wear the badges. Unlike Chila, I don't sit back and trust to the fickle workings of fate. I made a choice about the kind of life I wanted to have. When things go belly up, Chila always blames karma, Sunita blames her failed university career, I blame no-one but myself.

(*LHH* 1999: 148)

In a context like this, and as maintained in this dissertation, the different ways to cope with their reality will determine the characters' relationships with other people, either Indian or British, in terms of cultural duality and identity as well as in the different strategies used to overcome their identity crisis in a multicultural society. It cannot be forgotten that these women are creating a new culture, as Tania defends,

See how I combine a bindi with a leather jacket and make a bold statement about my duality? Look! I can go to a rave one night, and the next morning be cooking in the temple kitchen!

(*LHH* 1999: 148)

Consequently, it is necessary to re-examine the role of the writers who are the result of the existence of two simultaneous cultures.

In some cases, in the eyes of the white community duality is initially implied by the colour of skin. The awareness of the sentimental relationship between Cory and Saffron develops into a conversation between the former and Jennica that challenges the manual of conduct to be followed by Indian women. Despite her looks and colour, her ways, clothes

and sexual behaviour, are more typical of an English rather than an Indian woman. Like Saffron, a woman wearing a short skirt in the spice market, showing her legs, bringing no surprise come the wedding night and becoming the temptress of unsavoury thoughts in the opposite sex moves beyond the scope of tradition, as the many other topics analysed in this thesis and finds its counterbalance in Cory's reply in her defence,

Some men will have unsavoury thoughts no matter what a woman wears. I think women should be allowed to express themselves freely. If Saffron wants to dress like a slut then that's her choice. And if you really want to know, it turns me on.

(TDH 2007: 482)

It is in the same novel where we find Layla, an Indian girl brought up in the traditional way who cannot accept either Saffron's Britishness or Jeremy's homosexuality. Layla understands duality not only in the skin colour line but also in terms of sexual identity. Thus in her meeting with Saffron and her homosexual friend she talks about having met four friends rather than two friends,

For starters we have the two faces of Saffron, white and brown, and then there is you, Jeremy, both a boy and a girl.

(TDH 2007: 247)

This stands as a criticism of the violation of the Indian rule and the lack of recognition of her own limitations not to lead their life. Challenging the stereotypes involves breaking with all the expectations set on the individual; in our case, Tania spent her youth years,

[...] not being at home, feeding everyone, supporting everyone, smiling at everyone, keeping the family going, filling the hole.

(LHH 1999: 110)

It is referred to as "a mother-shaped hole", "not having plans, boundaries, a place" (LHH 1999: 111). Another point is the cost of this challenge. This could be exemplified

with Tania's case, a woman whose professional career is booming but who has failed as a daughter after abandoning and not caring for her brother and father.

Last but not least, gender relationships are deteriorated because of the clash between different ways of thinking. It is initially unbelievable for a woman to get divorced, to leave her husband, to forget her religion and rebel against *the* Indian lifestyle, either as a Sikh or as a Hindu. It is only when this happens that stereotypes begin to fade away and women find their own identity.

4.2.12.2 Independence: *Leading your own life* (DD 1998)

Indian traditional culture and its patriarchal ideology does not allow the individual any freedom but a control of thought, speech and actions, and a dependence on the father first and husband second, as maintained in section 2.1.3. Nevertheless, the complexity of the issue in the primary bibliography is seen in the contradictions behind any attempt to change the social and cultural direction of any country. In India, as in some homes in England,

[t]hese people don't really understand Viru, how much satisfaction there can be in leading your own life, in being independent. Here we are, fighting for the freedom of the nation, but women are still supposed to marry, and nothing else.'

(DD 1998: 17)

Despite the impossibility of finding answers in the Indian household context, the protagonists encounter their strongest adversary in other exterior spheres except in certain circumstances such as education. Thus and contrary to the the *Laws of Manu*, which defends the submission of the woman and the impossibility of freedom:

It was useless looking for answers inside the home. One had to look outside.
To education, freedom and the bright light of Lahore colleges.

(DD 1998: 17)

As can be read in the canon law of Hinduism, and as a proof of the violation of the code by the female character, in childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons; a woman must never be independent.

After Virmati's arrival to Lahore, Shakuntala was glad that her family was at last waking up to the fact that women had to take their place in the world, but must it always be when marriage hadn't worked out? (DD 1998: 112). Lahore represented autonomy and freedom, two key aspects of independence and self-assertion as represented in Virmati's vision of Swarna, her room mate:

Her options seemed to come from inside herself, her thoughts, ideas and feelings blended without any horrible sense of dislocation. She was committed, articulate.

(DD 1998: 135)

It is there where she becomes involved in conferences and where she realizes she has not really achieved the freedom she was looking for:

Am I free, thought Virmati. I came here to be free, but I am not like these women. They are using their minds, organizing, participating in conferences, politically active, while my time is spent being in love. Wasting it. Well, not wasting time, no, of course not, but then how come I never have a moment for anything else? Swarna does.

(DD 1998: 142)

It was time to give herself an opportunity, it was time to tackle the problems on her own. After having lived away for a year,

She had seen women growing in power and strength, claiming responsibility for their lives, declaring that society would be better off if its females were effective and capable. Why had she been so upset to learn of Harish's

absence? She would solve her problems on her own. She was worthy of independence.

(DD 1998: 163)

Back in England, Chila's initial acceptance of her duty and submission to her husband begins to undermine the foundations of her mother's education since she wonders about her life and the choice of independence. As she states in the beginning,

[t]he best advice my mum ever gave me was not to expect too much (the only thing she could say to me when I was growing up and messing up everything I touched). And it really works, you know. I've never been disappointed because everything good about Deeps is a big fat bonus. Every little lovely thing he does is a wonderful surprise. And I know at some point in the future he's going to severely piss me off, but I'm ready for it.

(LHH 1999: 38)

She goes through a process of deterioration in her marriage and that leads to her making plans to be independent. Being aware of a future tied to Deepak and built around him, she begins to wonder about her independence. Thus, her initial hesitation adopts a new life and, as indicated above, she initiates a new period as a new woman after becoming a mother.

To imagine otherwise would be like jumping out of a plane without a parachute free-falling towards God-knows *where*.

(LHH 1999: 160)

She becomes an observer of other realities. Her desire to be a different woman, be herself and not depend on anybody else is expressed through a metaphor concerning an unpredictable future that will find its completion with the birth of her son, the moment when she acquires a higher status as a woman. It is then that she initiates a new life of complete fulfilment without her husband. Now her duty is not to her partner but to herself and her descendants. This attitude is far beyond Raj's, Seena's husband, explained in

section 4.2.5, who grew up watching his mother below his father, and “she never complained, you assumed this was normal behaviour” (*LHH* 1999: 103).

Suki, an Indian woman, considers that things do not change quickly enough, in a conversation with Beroze, a barrister specializing in family law, who believes that “everyone eventually gets their day in court, metaphorically and literally speaking” (*LHH* 1999: 163). Suki, a defender of women fighting for their own space, adopts an active role in the defence of action. Her main contribution is her work at a project which helps women whose weakness does not allow them take action only with a phone call. In their necessity to cope with their situation of desperation because of their cultural restrictions, they have to find other ways to find their place in society. In spite of the traditional expectations of a woman as being “somebody’s daughter, somebody’s wife, somebody’s mother” (*LHH* 1999: 161), Suki can no longer agree on the discourse of women who do not act but look for excuses for not doing anything. As she states,

I meet women who on paper have no choices, but against every odd, they up and leave their homes, challenge their families, question their communities.

(*LHH* 1999: 161)

It opposes the defence of the need not to put any more pressure on them as far as “[w]e battle enough guilt, without beating ourselves up about not being braver and stronger.” (*LHH* 1999: 163). Thus not only is it necessary for women to fight from within their gender, for which there still exists lack of cooperation, but also reach a common agreement on the action to be undertaken.

Do you know how much effort it takes to stand still and do nothing, blame everyone else for your misery? Much more than it takes to actually change things, change yourself.

(*LHH* 1999: 161)

The rebellious attitude of the female characters is interpreted as a mockery of tradition. While Chila opts for separating from her husband, Marina chooses to ignore

social class barriers. The failure in her parents' responsibility accentuates a sense of guilt that increases on the decision to let Marina's uncle, Palekji, lead Marina onto the right path and to find her the best Hindu man in Britain. Contrary to Jeena's uncle in *The Marriage Market* (2006), he has been checking on her behaviour so he is aware of her real whereabouts as opposed to her parents' lack of knowledge

It was up to him to inculcate the strong wholesome Hindu values back into Marina. Rewire her mind and undo some of the Western ways that, no doubt, had caged her Eastern thinking. Goodbye, Marina, the bad Indian girl with Western ideas and values. Hello, Marina, the good Indian girl with impeccable Eastern promise.

(*P and P* 2004: 378)

Contrary to Jeena in *The Marriage Market* (2006), Marina's parents' unsuccessful attempt at education in the Indian way is left in the hands of her uncle to correct in India. However, I would like to insist on this issue much as it has been considered in sections 4.2.3 and 4.2.12.1.

Apart from the identity crisis suffered in a dual context, the female characters also have to learn how to cope with a situation that places them as inferior human beings in comparison to the women who submitted to tradition. In spite of being fully aware of the consequences of their actions, some of them flout an accepted way of behaving and become detractors of their own community. To Marina's attempt to educate Emily in the etiquette of the Indian runaway, the difficulty to understand the punishing character of the Indian canon ends in the acceptance, not without resignation, of the consequences of her conduct. Such acceptance is expressed through a metaphor that labels women as the weak and the unfortunate, weak for not having a personality strong enough to fight for their desired choices, and unfortunate as their future marriage will probably bring chains, unhappiness and no easy escape,

How is it that many Indian girls who have gone against tradition sometimes walk around with a chapatti on their shoulder. The Indian equivalent of a chip. Because they have made the break, broken with family values, become

a martyr, they look down upon the Indian girls who have not made that break. The weak ones. They stare with a pitiful eye and snigger with superiority. They see the Indian girls waiting for an arranged marriage as 'the unfortunates'. And it is unfortunate. Unfortunate that they act this way, like the Indian girl on the other side of the dance floor. Maybe she should eat her chapattis.

(*P and P* 2004: 71)

The ignorance and brutality of tradition is taken to the extreme with the existence of cases like *Karmal Sutra*. Being raped by her uncle, disowned after her pregnancy and the baby given in adoption, she became dead in her parents' eyes, a traditional Sikh family. After a traditional upbringing and her disownment she becomes a porn star and recognises that she "wouldn't like her daughter to meet her real mother for shame" (*TDH* 2007: 415). As she states concerning her rape,

My uncle raped me. My own flesh and blood. The turban-wearing man who religiously went to the temple every Sunday. Raped me! Left me pregnant with his child. I when I tried to tell my mother, instead of believing me, she cursed me and threw me out of the house.

(*TDH* 2007: 415)

Whereas in *The Marriage Market* (2006) Jeena's uncle aims to educate her niece in the Indian tradition after her parents' failure, in *Tall, Dark and Handsome* (2007), the uncle who seemed to be the perfect Sikh and the supposed perpetuator of the old ways betrayed a member of his own family. This betrayal shows the ignorance and hypocrisy of this particular family, moved by external appearances, and the violation of a supposed right code of conduct by a member of the Indian community that could not apparently be suspected of such an atrocity. The extremes of cultural beliefs are represented in the last lines with the prevalence of culture over truth. Her name, *Karmal Sutra* plays with the *Kama Sutra*, a classic guide to lovemaking, reflecting the social and sexual traditions of the times written sometime in the 3rd century. It is divided into seven chapters that point

to a clear code of sexual conduct and that also advises the reader on diverse issues like the right choice of wife or her appropriate conduct, among others.

In the same line of pornography, Flint's, Cory's friend and a porn star, proposal for an Indian film with local women in India is refused by Cory for respect and the awareness of cultural polarisation. He indirectly defends his respect for Saffron and defines the disparity between the two cultures, the Indian culture not being receptive to the Western indecent ways. Cory's defence of the local people in India for their authenticity is conversely interpreted by Flint as an uncharted territory in which a porn project has never been achieved before and which would develop into globalisation and the economic market of offer and demand for a new product, a product that would not fall into the category of Indo-chic maintained above. These differences are also relevant in the treatment given to women. Whenever Flint sleeps with a woman, he tells them the truth about his porn job. Unlike him, Cory hides the fact that he owns a porn business making people believe he is something he is not.

How about you and I take a trip to India and make some porn out there with some of the local women. Imagine the locations. Imagine the colours. Imagine the weather. Imagine me unwrapping their saris.

(TDH 2007: 232)

Flint's words play with the idea of the exotic, the attraction towards difference and the violation of the Indian code of sexuality regarding sexual relationships between an Indian woman and a white man and the idea of sex for money.

I already highlighted Jeena's kidnap to study the *Guru Granth Sabih* and being taken to India to marry a Sikh man (Section 4.2.3) and the existence of the burial of baby girls (section 4.2.7) in terms of gender. The female characters are fully aware of these atrocities. Jeena, the protagonist of *The Marriage Market* (2006) and who accepts a one-year friendship marriage with a white man to avoid an arranged marriage, is conscious of the fact that some girls are locked up. As she states,

It was not as uncommon as people might imagine. Locked up, beaten up and messed up. But even worse than that, just like in the book *1984*, in Asian culture, women can even be charged with thought-crime. *Thinking* about running off with a man can be punished in just the same way as if she *had* run off with him. And Jeena's crime –marrying a white man– was top of the heap when it came to crimes against culture.

(TMM 2006: 427)

Contemporary British literature is beginning to show, as is the case in the cinema with films like *India's missing girls*, the atrocities done to Indian women in England and India. Regarding Zarleena and Armin, the protagonists in *Bindis and Brides* (2005), after suffering from her husband's rapes and beating since they married in 2004, Zarleena became independent although she had to fight for that independence. Until her separation from her husband, not only is she subject to such rapes but also to his threat to show photographs of her naked if she did not give him the money he wanted. He considers her a "shit wife" (*B and B* 2005: 236) and as he says "I don't think there is a low enough caste for you" (*B and B* 2005: 236). However, in spite of her fear, she is able to confront her husband,

With a trembling voice she began, 'Please do not interrupt. Firstly, and I think you knew this was coming, I want a divorce'. (...) My parents have given me their full backing on this. Secondly, Zarleena paused, amazed Armin wasn't interrupting, 'secondly, the gold was given to me as a present as such it was mine to do with as I wished. So I did, I sold it.' A small gasp could be heard at the other end. 'and lastly, you're extremely lucky I never called the police yesterday regarding the spiders. (...) 'And if you think this is a joke, then I had better tell you the punchline.

(*B and B* 2005: 125)

The assertion of her words violates the Indian woman's control of speech to the benefit of gaining a life of her own. It allows a self -modified discourse of tradition as regards gender and the woman's power in conversation. Being aware of her parents' heritage, she allows herself to go through the arranged marriage system but not to the

extent of the degradation of her self -dignity through beating and threats. Consequently, the acceptance of marriage and its hope for success become two sides of a coin that do not always necessarily fit together.

The modified gender discourse is observed in the woman's assertiveness and security in her speech, and the husband's submission to her words, contrary to the correct Indian code of conduct towards the husband, as happens with the other passages. Opposed to an imposed traditional silence on the woman's side, her strength to confront her husband leads to the use of jokes, an area which women were not allowed entering.

Mess up and I'll let the whole Indian community know how you used to beat me. News like that will spread quicker than the Internet. You would be ashamed and shunned! She paused, frozen by his silence, and did what she normally did when faced with nerves the size of magos, she made a mockery of the situation. In her best American accent she said, 'Go on, punk, make my day! 'And she hung up feeling drenched with foolishness.

(B and B 2005: 125)

There is a development onwards, a process towards freedom. It was amazing to see how

[s]he could make the effort to dress in the fashion of her own culture when she wanted to make money in her business, but when they had lived as a married couple; she was hardly seen out of Western clothes. She needed to be taught some respect.

(B and B 2005: 183)

So from the moment she leaves her husband, she sets up her own business, as indicated above, one that offers her both personal and financial independence; she is gaining her own ground and marking her own territory without the need of having a man beside her. Although she is constantly surrounded by fears caused by her husband's threats, soon she realises he can rape her body but not her mind and that what began with

Indian recipes became a recipe for a good life, for being positive and having a sense of self-fulfilment. In Prem's opinion she was too westernized, "In India she would have been burnt alive for the behaviour she adopted" (*B and B* 2005: 57).

The main responsibility for the situation of women lies with women themselves. If changes do not begin from within little or nothing can be done. In *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (1999), Chila is not subject to formal education but to the accumulation of worldly knowledge through experience. She defends the idea that they women have to start with themselves in order to change people's minds. As she maintains,

You don't learn the important stuff from books. It happens to you and someone gives it a long name afterwards. You should know that by now.

(*LHH* 1999: 233)

a discourse of education considered by B. K. Mahal in *The pocket guide to being an Indian girl* (2004) and analysed in greater detail in the following section.

Having said this, and although I have pointed out some issues on motherhood in section 4.2.7, a way for women to lead their own life is the possibility to choose their children's sex. Thus, the traditional discourse on motherhood is being challenged and modified in Chila and Sunita's conversation, of which a passage has been included above (See *LHH* 1999: 233). Their words point, like most of the examples included in this dissertation, to a new model of femininity that springs from a hybrid culture. Being part of a modernised society, Chila is aware of the existence of clinics where they guarantee you can have a boy. Therefore, women are free to choose and she is aware of the long list of Indian women on it. The observation of this possibility in the new model of femininity also responds to the existing harshness and the rooting of gender inequality and the benefits of the birth of a boy rather than a girl in Indian culture. As Chila considers, "I don't expect many ladies go there asking to have a girl, do they?" (*LHH* 1999: 233). Thus, the writer offers this double perspective as part of woman's independence but also as a reaction against rules they consider atrocious.

In the background of the woman's struggle for their independence there is the opinion of the most traditional sector of the Indian community. Things had been too easy for the British Asian individuals and it was time to know how the members of the first generation had worked for a life they took for granted. Jeena would have to learn some conduct,

She'd soon know respect for her elders. How not to back-chat them. How not to get in their way. How not to undermine them. How to agree with everything they say. How to learn and understand their religion, what being a Sikh really means. And especially how not to upset her own parents.

(TMM 2006: 183)

4.2.12.3 The university of life

In chapter 2 I highlighted the awareness of the new opportunities offered by education. The discourse of education in terms of formal reception as to reading and writing finds its most immediate substitute in education at the university of life. In India, the standpoint of education as the previous step to marriage is considered not only by Manju Kapur in her work *Difficult Daughters* (1998), so a writer living and working in India but also by Meera Syal in *Anita and Me* (1996). As for Manju Kapur, Kasturi, Virmati's mother, maintains that,

Study means developing the mind for the benefit of the family. I studied too, but my mother would have killed me if I had dared even to want to dress in anything other than was bought for me.

(DD 1998: 17)

Education is regarded as the means for the control of one's own destiny. However, in Virmati's case, the female protagonist in *Difficult Daughters* (1998), although her desire for freedom and independence is partially accomplished, she is not free from the chains and disappointment of her own choices. Her time in Amristar becomes the darkest episode in her marriage. Therefore not only does she live under the shadow of

her husband's first wife but her actions are constantly restrained to the level of losing her own identity. It is the dichotomy between education and marriage that haunts Virmati -her confusion grows,

[...] but what could she wish? Early marriage and no education? No professor, and no love? Her soul revolved and her sufferings increased.

(DD 1998: 54)

She was hurting her family not by educating herself but by not marrying. Her father and grandfather thought "school and college would strengthen you, not change you" (DD 1998: 59). Thus, after having studied as much as any girl in Amristar, her father and grandfather did not wish her study more. Because of her decision not to marry in order to receive further education, her family locks her in the godown. It is thanks to Paro's, her sister, help that she can communicate with the Professor by means of letters. In one of the letters she shows her concerns on her mother's position about education;

My mother keeps saying that all my education has achieved is the destruction of my family. How am I supposed to respond, I don't know.

(DD 1998: 99)

Unlike her family, which tries to discourage her from further education, the Professor motivates her in his discourse on the benefits of education in the development of the individual. Not only does it open the way for the individuals to think for themselves, but it also reinforces our decisions, as far as they have been discussed and analysed, without interferences from the outside world but by our critical and analytical capacity,

Even if we arrive at the same conclusions that have been presented to us, our faith in those beliefs are stronger for having been personally thought out. If, as sometimes happens, our education leads us to question some of the value systems by which we live, that is not to say that we are destroying tradition. The tradition that refuses to entertain doubt, or remains impervious

to new thoughts and ideas becomes a prison rather than a sustaining life force.

(DD 1998: 102)

As a consequence the factors affecting gender relations and culture are not accepted just because the elders tell us about them but because our capacity allows us weigh the pros and cons and reach a conclusion concerning our choices and preferences.

Virmati goes to college first and then marries a man contrary to her parents' wishes as he is a married man. Thus gender relations are also affected by the girls' education and the elders' forced acceptance. On the one hand, the more education they receive the later they get married,

'Still, it is the duty of every girl to get married', replied Kasturi mildly.

She lives for others, not herself, but what to do, everybody in our family is like that. And with all this reading-writing, girls are getting married late. It is the will of God, concluded Lajwanti aggressively.

(DD 1998: 16)

On the other hand, the move from one generation to another has associated education with the opposition to parents. In Kasturi's time, that is a generation before Virmati's,

[...] going to school had been a privilege, not to be abused by going against one's parents. How had girls changed so much in just a generation?

(DD 1998: 60)

One of the girls' duties was to read "books of moral and intellectual substance" (AMW 2003: 27), needless to say it constitutes one more of the manipulation strategies exercised by those in higher power.

In the British literary production under analysis, Meena's grandmother, Namina, tells her granddaughter of a traditional upbringing coupled with a basic teaching to read and write, contrary to most other girls her age.

My childhood was good but short. It was always this way for girls. I was the plum one, the beautiful one. I never went out without covering my head. I knew my beauty would bring the dogs running if I did not. (...) I went to school, my father insisted. I was lucky, to read and write and learn to recite from the Granth Sabih. Never did I think I was less than a man. More than a man sometimes, this I was. To cook and clean and carry and fetch and soothe and smile and climb and fall.

(AM 1996: 231)

A description of a woman who went through marriage at the age of 16, an imaginable situation regarding Anita who would be 16 soon and which shows a step forward in the evolution of the human kind. As Anita states, "I could not imagine Anita ever getting married. Nor myself for that matter. Ever." (AM 1996: 231).

In this novel, *Anita and Me* (1996) Anita's parents do not want her to be deprived of an education, as happened to them. They had to leave India for being "poor and clever, a bad combination in India". (AM 1996: 212). Thus it is after knowing about her parents' life in India and the search for a better life in England when she felt her duty towards her parents. The eleven-plus exam was much more than that, as she considers her failure to pass the exam would show the uselessness of her parents' journey to England in search for better life prospects, her

[...] parents' hopes for the future, the justification for their departure from India, our possible move out of Tollington.

(AM 1996: 306)

In Meera Syal's second novel, *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (1999), Sunita's parents are considered to be more open than Tania's and Chila's. Their openness is viewed in terms of the freedom to receive an education and not going straight into marriage. Bhopal's study (2000) focused on how levels of education accept tradition regarding arranged marriage and dowry. While women with high levels of education reject it and women with low levels accept it, it is here where the difference between traditional and independent women comes to the front.

At the same time, what was termed as *horror marriage* in *Bindis and Brides* (2005), now is named *assisted marriage* by Sunita's father; for him, they "we [referring to Sunita's parents] help, we advise and we leave it to her" (LHH 1999: 149) but always with the subtext "choose anyone you like, preferably a Hindu Punjabi with prospects" (LHH 1999: 149). This idea goes back to Greek thought when a person had not achieved his status in life; he needed assistance, advice and support. But what about Tania? By the time of her first introductions she was out of university, and with no interest in marriage,

[...] freelancing for local papers and being propositioned by an array of multi-coloured, multifascinating, fit young men.

(LHH 1999: 150)

Contrary to Manju Kapur in India and Meera Syal in England, in later books, the traditional discourse of education requires a redefinition and modification which, like the modified discourse of tradition, is not devoid of conflict. Therefore one way of avoiding conflict is making things clear and let parents know that the characters really mean what they say. In this case it was the parents who had no choice. In Nisha Minhas' case, Avani's parents want her to go to school in order not to get "a rubbish job" (*S and S* 2003: 169). However she tries to convince everyone that she can get a good one without "Letts study Guides or revision" (*S and S* 2003: 169).

Contrary to what was happening in India, with women fighting for their education as the achievement of freedom and autonomy, Susham Dillon in *The Pocket Guide To Being An Indian Girl* (2004) in England wants to achieve this freedom without an education. She was the only girl in Dudley without a qualification and she has to go to college to get one. To her, "college is the last place to be educated" (TPG 2004: 5); "studying isn't just about a textbook" (TPG 2004: 228), although she is always reminded of her lack of a proper education. To her family, she would never amount to anything and she would let the family down. While her sister was reading self-help books on the social differences between men and women, the reader can also find a de-valuation of education, "Education has gone downhill since the days of Charlie Brown" (TPG 2004: 4).

Having reached this point, and although it moves beyond the scope of this research, a study by Bhopal (2000) showed that women with a higher education refuse traditional practices like arranged marriage and dowry while women with lower levels of education tend to not reject them and find justifiable answers to it. In this view, the refusal of the traditional practices indicated above lead to independence and, as defended in *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (2000) and mainly *The Pocket Guide To Being An Indian Girl* (2004), the individual does not need to go through education to be independent and have their choices in life, though it is true that it helps. With this attitude these women refuse to be subject to the strict conditions of submissive behaviour. It cannot be forgotten that in Indian culture man has traditionally had choices contrary to woman, who is always controlled and judged.

Each character reacts to the conflicting demands of being *Asian* in England in different ways: Chila and Zarleena by assuming the stereotypes though they are challenged and refused in the end; Marina, following the advice of the grandmother; Marina and Thomas, crossing class barriers; Dave, overcoming any age, culture, perhaps an honour gap, “maybe even an intelligence gap—but hopefully not a moral gap” (*TMM* 2006: 271); Kiran and Mr Akhtar, by placing community commitment above personal fulfilment. As Brown (1985: 133) maintained

In all societies people manage to come to terms with the difference between ideal norms and actual behaviour” and what Indian women are doing is not only responding to male control but also to a wider social structure; they are reacting against the little or no space they have not had for centuries.

In sum, India is remembered with nostalgia by parents while, for the second generation, it is a distant country they have never visited and whose traditions are far from understanding.

In the following section I will provide the reader with some concluding remarks and some proposals for future study. This thesis concludes with a statement by one of the most important and representative writers in contemporary British literature, a passage that can lead the reader for further reflection.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS

In this chapter, by way of conclusion, the significance of the present study is critically assessed. First of all it is worth remembering that from the beginning of this dissertation I referred to the female writers and their characters, born in England and with parents from the Indian subcontinent, as British Asian so as to sustain the idea they have been brought up in a cross-cultural environment, and as such, they are the direct heirs of two traditions, the Indian and the British one and to keep a coherent line due to the existence of a diversified terminology applied to the younger generations. In such a specific context, and as has been maintained, specific gender relations arise partly due to wrongly assigned prejudices and gender expectations of behaviour and attitudes in the British Asian community. The basic concepts derived from this analysis were those of gender identity and relations, which are tied to a specific form of conduct in its different branches, identity, sexuality, religion or marriage, among others; and an ideologically imposed code that constructs the metaphor of conduct books as defended in this dissertation. I have observed that the literature under study intends to reproduce most of the patterns of behaviour expected from Indian women in a way similar to conduct books. In fact the literature under analysis reproduces a code and gender roles transmitted through centuries and with some parallelisms that go back to English ancient conduct books (Mason 1935, on conduct books back to the period between 1531-1774; Sir Thomas Smith 1612; Morris 2005, on conduct books between 1531-1774; Fordyce 1776) as regards, as a mode of example, the choice of a good wife, the mother's duty towards the children, sexual conduct, manners, women's submission to their husband in words or actions or restriction of opinion. Nevertheless this perception would require a deeper study.

Despite the importance of the role of women and the expectations as a good daughter, mother and the achievement of objectives set by tradition, there still exists, as observed, an evident lack of training on the psychological side while the strict social borders do not allow an easy solution. Whereas in the early days, and even today in some countries, it responded to a lack of proper education, an early marriage and the lack of experience, nowadays it is tied to the lack of understanding, false stereotypes and the difficulty of coping with a duality that challenges a pride in tradition and roots and with the implications and demands of modernity and in my view, the most

important ones being the opening of the mind and the acceptance of the new ways without the limits indicated by the stereotypes of both communities, mainly as concerns the prejudices against British citizens.

In Chapter 1 the focus of attention was laid on the selection of some issues that better approached the reading of the primary bibliography in the line of conduct books as far as identity, language and ideology are concerned. The treatment of issues from the point of view of British Asian women as direct receptors of a dual message and the female writers' desire to have their voices heard emphasise gender consciousness and polarisation in the reformulation of social and cultural roles, a polarisation forced by a strict social order which is symbolically changing from the silence and subjugation of its women to a system where the self prevails over traditional norms. We have seen that the concepts of gender, identity and ideology go through a process of transformation that will not reach its final completion until it has covered an overall scale. Nevertheless, it contributes to the triumph of the concept of a culture of duality subject to negotiation.

Chapter 2 gathered some key issues on Indian culture as the frame within which to better understand its precepts and to situate and analyse the gender conflict in a dual culture, the British one, in which relationships are becoming “the new religion of the millennium” (LHH 1999: 65). All the concerns derive from the maintenance of tradition and point to an indirect guide of conduct whose fulfilment is weakening and becoming subject to negotiation and rethinking on a social, cultural and political scale. Whereas in previous years the voice of women was silenced, what these female writers are doing is revealing the experiences of individuals not wishing to be known for the same submissiveness and culture barriers imposed on their mothers. Consequently, both the female writers and their characters are, as shown in the previous sections, gaining their own ground and breaking with both the stereotypes and the expectations imposed on them.

The *Laws of Manu* and the *Guru Granth Sahib* constitute by themselves a code of conduct transmitted through generations, countries and continents. As has been

maintained, the first generation members have intended to transmit a whole set of rules. More recently, in the books, *Tina 'n' Nikil* (2006) about arranged marriage and *Web of lies*, published in October 2008, about teenage pregnancy, the author, Rashmita Patel, provides the potential reader, British Asian teenagers first and teenagers in general second, tips on what to do. This may not be considered in the line of conduct books but of the so called self-help books, books in which the reader can find answers to issues they cannot talk about with their parents, surprising as it may seem, and whose immediate response points to a hypothetical rebirth of this literature.

The paradoxes and complexities of the issue also find its portrayal in the dangerous mixture of globalisation and multiculturalism, two concepts that do not seem to move in the same direction, and that while the former involves generalisation and uniqueness the latter points to diversity, and as a result of this, division. The coexistence of different communities and the definition of the country in terms of multiculturalism may become a dangerous arena. Therefore while this group diversity may point to the acceptance of different attitudes and behaviours, paradoxically it also may be regarded in terms of division and the defence of *your* community's values over the others with its subsequent confrontations. For the members of the second generation, no matter the community their parents come from, their British Asian identities will always be characterised by specific traits, this reinforces Crane's idea that identity is never pure but includes lots of identities, those of the Indian and the white communities, and the different roles they adopt, a situation that can, and is supposed to change, in the next generation so that they are able to handle the reins of their self rather than depend on the other. As Sauerberg (2001: 119) maintains,

Creating fictional universes within this framework at a time when British society is changing radically from monocultural to intercultural, that is, with the 'other' as a more and more visibly given in society, has meant bringing cultural differences into the foreground.

However, racial and group opposition is not only reflected between the Indian and the host community but also between other minority groups. It is worth highlighting Cory's

attempts to bring Indian and Pakistani lads together in *The Marriage Market* (2006) in an attempt to show the positive and not the negative aspects in the coexistence of two groups with a shared history of separation. The section on racism and prejudice reinforced Holmes' (1991) conception that most of the opposition is socially and culturally generated, rather than organically related to the individual psyche. Such arguments reinforced the economic weight in race prejudices and the conception of the individual in terms of the position on the social ladder. Racism is the direct consequence of hypocrisy and the difficulty of understanding diversity. The female characters struggle to fight racism challenges Burdsey's (2006) view of racism as a passive stereotype.

In a world in which everything and everyone is the target of categorization, a possible hypothesis indicated the inclusion of the new literature under some heading. Nevertheless the academic reception of these writers has been either limited as in Meera Syal's case or inexistent as in Nisha Minhas and B. K. Mahal's. Thus the thesis went through some of the bibliography on Indian literature so as to consider the terminology used to name the production by writers of either Asian or English birth and or education. Consequently, the reader can approach the literature written and the way it is evolving in contemporary society. Whereas Alphonse' taxonomy (1997) pointed to a specificity tied to a particular time and space, the term transcultural literature (Schulze-Engler 2007) offers a more globalised perspective which lumps together the different ethnic groups. Thus while keeping the idea of ethnicity, it functions as a thread that is woven through the observation of a reality of culture clash with group peculiarities different from the whole as opposed to the term 'black British literature' (Donnell 2002, Stein 2004), which brings together all the ethnic groups with no differentiation between them by using the generic term *black* and which shows the rift between cultures. The identification of current British literature as transcultural testifies an awareness of a new trend which shows its attributes in an emerging literary field in the lights and shadows of the process of cultural transition. As far as my research is concerned, no other term has been included to refer to contemporary British literature after the last publications within my reach after 2007, transcultural literature being the most recent one. As has been indicated in Chapter 3 I would not include the literature by Nisha Minhas and B.

K. Mahal as postcolonial to the extent that, and as has also been indicated above, their interests and concerns are far from what has been labelled as postcolonial. More recently, Murphy and Sim (2008) have widened the term British Asian to “include writers and works that have a West Asian or East African focus” (2008: 3), so authors from Japan, Hong Kong and Malaysia, and redefining the traditional connection between the term British Asian and the writers with a South Asian background.

Since the end of World War II, the arrival of immigrants to England has modified both the cultural and social panorama. While in the beginning the writers focused on the relationship between the colonisers and the colonised and the idea of India as exotic, literature is currently moving in a direction that moves from the telling of the experiences of the first generation’s arrival to England to a new literature written by women focusing mainly on female characters who demand a space in which they can fulfil their personal and social independence. In order to achieve such an aim they are not devoid of gender and identity conflict as I outlined in this dissertation, a psychological battle to satisfy social and personal demands with the gradual success of the latter. Therefore, and as indicated in the introduction, the three writers under study tackle the problem of gender identity, race, displacement and the ambivalent acceptance of Western social behaviour and attitudes. Being the heirs of a strict patriarchal ideology, and despite their birthplace, some members of the second generation are still expected to reproduce culturally and socially approved forms of behaviour while being aware of the existence of other realities. It was here where Watts’ definition of power as “the ability of an individual to achieve his/her desired goals” (1991: 145) came into play and proved to be gaining ground on the female characters’ side in a way that power and ideology is redefined to the detriment of patriarchy

The white dominated literary panorama is being redefined in the current British context and being given a new light with a recently growing number of British Asian female writers whose works are offering the reader the possibility for fresh air and is revealing a quiet and chained censorship that has hidden what they knew was morally incorrect. These writers’ works act as a denunciation of a personal, social and cultural cruelty and thus are making an apparently unmovable institution tumble down. All in

all, we are dealing with a set of writers that write about the problems and realities of a community, to which they belong, that some individuals consider should be silenced but to which they still give their voice.

Some of the discoveries have been the recent character of this new literature and the projects aimed at the spread of the Asian and British Asian arts, fields that could become the raw material for future research as highlighted further below. Both coexist in a contradictory literary panorama that bring together the uniqueness of the regional literary production in Wales, England and Scotland and the effects of multiculturalism, and as thus, the amalgam of different groups, traditions and doctrines. With the increasing appearance of this new literature the academic reception is expected to rise, to which this thesis attempts to contribute to and enhance further research. Through this new literature the reader, either Asian or British, will be in contact with issues that he may not associate with the British Asian community with the belief that some concerns only seem to affect a section of the population and not others. This last point links with Beronze's idea. After Tania's première, Beroze, a lawyer specialising in family law and Suki, a British Asian woman congratulate her on her programme; as Beronze states,

You went for the whole picture. I mean, we're like any other bunch of people, right? We have successes and our failures. It's all a lottery in the end.

(LHH 1999: 180)

I would venture to say that although Nisha Minhas and B. K. Mahal have not received the attention they deserve, as maintained in the introductory notes to this thesis, it will soon develop into a new subject concern and worthy of scholarly attention, and consequently, more noticeable by more socially and culturally influential institutions. As indicated in previous sections, literature is a reflection of a reality, which is being given a written form and making people, know what is happening to those universally acknowledged as ethnic minorities. A fact is that only a period of twelve years has separated the first conference with the first representation of women "Writers of the Indian diaspora" (1995) and Nisha Minhas' latest work *Tall, Dark and*

Handsome (2007); only a year later Meera Syal published her first novel, *Anita and Me* (1996), five years later Nisha Minhas published her first book *Chapatti or Chips* (2000). Moreover, despite the three-year-gap between Nisha Minhas' first and second books, all the others have followed a yearly publication. While Nisha Minhas and B. K. Mahal are still involved in the literary market, Meera Syal is connected to the media world and has not published any other novel since 1999, of which a German translation appeared under the title *Sari, Jeans und Chilischoten* (2003).

As analysed in Chapter 4, the preservation of the rules historically dictated by tradition is being challenged and redefined not without a set of subsequent conflicts, controversies and drawbacks of what means living between two worlds-the Hindu -Sikh heritage and a new dual British identity. While gender identity is negotiated along the dual, paradoxically related dimensions of power and connection (Holmes and Meyerhoff 2003: 179), a perspective is provided by the reality of the Indian household and another one by the outside world. Even within the same family, the battle between tradition and contemporaneity is observed on the diversity of opinions. Consequently, the challenge of power relations is being redefined in the micro context of the Indian household so as to transfer it to the community first and then to a more global sphere. Paradoxically, it still opposes a society in which music and cinema foster Asianness in the British context. Studies on British Asians include Ballard (1994), Baumann (1996), Modood (1994), Werbner (1990).

The second generation is engaged in a continuous dichotomy of questioning themselves. It is for this reason that they create their own mechanisms of survival as expressed in the use of irony and humour, metaphors, the appeal to universal values to overcome individual restrictions forced by tradition, the ingenuous play with some of its creeds to criticise gender behaviour, a direct reference to the characters' conscience and the need for the elders' agreement in cases of hesitation. The aim of these mechanisms is twofold; the necessity to express the conflict of the inner self and achieve some relief and, increase their strength in the adoption of a new role that allows them a new wind of change. According to Upstone (2010: 11, draft chapter) the power of humour is

intended to “counter negative emotions and (...) as a way to challenge the prejudices of the Asian communities”.

Whenever the objectives above are accomplished they stem from a process of negotiation and consensus not only with their parents but also with themselves and within the couple as seen between Naina and Ashok through the establishment of the own terms of their relationship, and Jeena and Aaron through a friendship marriage. It is worth remembering at this point that arranged marriage is considered as a contract between two families, and not two individuals and, therefore, the definition of a relationship solely in the couple's terms is offensive to the Indian way. As Naina states in a conversation with Ashok, “I'd rather you be yourself. Then I can see the real you” (*Ch or Ch* 2000: 35). Nevertheless, on the parents' side such negotiation does not result from natural impulses and on behalf of their daughter's happiness but only after their daughter experiences extreme situations of physical and mental abuse at the hands of her husband and with a white man having the courage to confront the Indian parents, and as a consequence, a whole set of rules which pertain to a larger scheme of society. In this context, the lack of communication between mother and daughter develops into a dialogue between Indian parents and a member of the white community, which reinforces the personal, cultural and social process of negotiation and consensus defended in this dissertation. Also in the achievement of such negotiation, the role of the individual within the family is reversed from the moment the younger generations begin to achieve their aims and it does not depend on the elders so much. The power hierarchy is subject to modification and the roles of the father and elder brother in the decision-making for the whole family is being diluted in contemporary British society. Even the conception of the woman as a marketable product, that is, an element of exchange to preserve the conventions of one's own culture without any consideration for the desires of the individual fades. As regards Indian brothers, the defence of tradition would not be so much in tune with the defence of their Indian identity as with a defence of a desired masculinity on the right Indian man despite his British birth and upbringing. The reactions of Indian brothers as regards their submission match the role model assigned to women. Thus, and following Wyatt (2000), they assume functions traditionally attributed to women and otherwise. In this reversal of gender roles, as analysed in Chapter 4, the man's submission to tradition is counterbalanced by a strong

and confident woman “cuya energía se ve reflejada en su poder the actuar” (Wyatt 2000: 88). The traditional model of the desirable woman is far removed from the white man’s conception (and some British Asian born men) of what a woman should be like, thus, the old values of submission find their replacement in the prevalence of the happiness of self in the process of the modification of female qualities and behaviour expectations.

The writers also offer another parents’ perspective. Being born to Indian parents but adopted by an English family, Saffron’s (*TDH* 2007) inner displacement creates a symbolic separation that opens the way to an identity searching process in India. The need to assert herself and not to be questioned submerges her in a process of self-discovery that models her initial perception and the reversal of a responsibility she considered belonged to her white parents to teach her about India and which accentuates the problematic relationship with Cory, an English man who knew more about India than herself. Thus, her initial beliefs and the assumption that what you are shapes your identity differently for someone who cannot take it for granted is given a new light on the discovery that the colour of skin is insufficient to define you one way or another. It is your upbringing what matters in the end. Furthermore, the liberal message by the Indian parents based on the freedom to find a job and letting their daughters out but not on the selection of the husband-to-be does not coincide with the individual’s meaning of life and a world full of lies, unfaithfulness and false appearances, which requires the transmission of a new message to the older generations.

The female characters analysed are teenagers in search for a freedom away from a social heritage they have not chosen willingly. This involves the presence of characters who, not being initially able to choose other possibilities, have no option but to assume a whole social, cultural and personal scheme they will soon challenge. Nevertheless, the presence of Western elements of behaviour is not regarded as a violation and disrespect of the Indian way but a result of the process of identity formation in a dual context.

Apart from this group, the feeling of sympathy or repulsion felt by some women towards the so called rebellious girls can be interpreted not so much as a defence of the traditional lore but as the disguise under which there remains hidden the lack of courage to transgress the prevailing ideology and live their lives in accordance with their own code. The British Asian female characters' desire not to dwell on their parents' past but move forward in a look towards the future makes them wonder about their identity. This, together with the possession of a double heritage, coexists with awareness that the situation would have been different if they had been born a generation later. On the one hand, Indian parents still instruct their daughters on how to become good role models despite their British birth and upbringing. On the other, the reader can observe a construction of a new model of femininity shifting between two cultures in the metaphor of conduct books suggested in this thesis. This new model will contribute to a better understanding of their situation and the observation that with change things can take a new shape. The characteristics that better define the new model of woman can be summarised as follows:

- Development of the self and independence over tradition.
- Refusal of a codified code of behaviour, thus refusing, artifice and emphasizing naturalness.
- Assertiveness, confidence and the destruction of Sita's concept of women's submission, together with reactions according to the Western way and not the Indian one.
- The need for illusion, as represented by Tania's desire to become a mainstream writer in *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (1999), Sushi's sister's desire to become an actress or a Banghra star or, the young Indian girl's desire to become an astronaut in *The Pocket Guide To Being An Indian Girl* (2004).

In this new femininity marriage, and considering some of the issues analysed, is defined in terms of love, with the inclusion of interracial marriages, respect, knowledge of the husband-to-be and not having to identify the marital status with trial and suffering but as a relationship between equals. Motherhood is seen as the path towards

independence and as the beginning of gender respect in a culture in which cultural restrictions lead to terminations for fear of the birth of a girl rather than a boy. While, as indicated in Chapter 4, divorce was a word that could not be found in the Indian dictionary, now, in the creation of the new model of femininity its meaning is attached to self respect in situations of physical and psychological mistreatment. As for the discourse on sexual relationships, it is based on love, cooperation and reciprocal pleasure. In this redefinition, the woman adopts an active role, decides on the man with whom to initiate her sexual life and the attempt not to be caught having sex with a white man is replaced by the female's sexual competence. As observed in Chapter 4, India developed an *ars erotica* in which pleasure is understood as a practice and accumulated as experience. Whereas at this point, men, not women, were expected to feel sexual pleasure, now, it is a feeling associated with both, men and women, in a way that female sexual desires are not defined by the others but by themselves in a free speech on sex. Consequently, they are demanding, and achieving, a personal sexual code.

While it is also true that, as Pichler maintained (2007), popular media representations of arranged marriage continue to perpetuate the stereotype of the suppressed Asian girl as a victim of culture clash; such a role is being challenged and redefined in the bibliography subject to study in this dissertation. Nevertheless and despite the changes towards modernity, marriage failure is still regarded as the fault of women for a codified responsibility for not having made the effort to continue it. Consequently, "the turmoil, anxiety, and contradictory expectations" (Parikh 1989: 144) that characterise the first years of marriage worsens with the obligation to justify your actions.

In spite of the presence of female characters that reject and battle against the rigid rules of the Indian code, it is still a reality and the characters manage to achieve their own independence and a *desired marriage*, as two significant examples out of the different issues analysed in this thesis, but not without conflict and confusion. The union of terms like *saris* and *sins* or *passion* and *poppadoms* attempts to come to terms with a daily dichotomy caused by the existence of a dual culture. All of them do not culturally and socially come together. In this context the marriage market is not

independent from the conception of the daughter as a selling product examined in Chapter 2 and looked at more closely on Chapter 4, as linked to current trends like Netrimony in *Netrimony: The new mating game Damayanti* (AIM 13.03.2008).

As we have seen, prejudices do not only exist among the Asian community, whose strict followers create their strategies through stereotyping, but also in the host society. As to the former, Naina reprimands Dave when she timidly gives him some hints about her worries: “Just because you watch one documentary on the BBC about arranged marriages, you think you know it all” (*Ch or Ch* 2000: 68). As to the host society, Thomas’ conceptions on the impossibility of cultures mixing or the and association of Indian women with expected cooking skills are instances of the models of tradition kept alive in time together with the new social spectrum. On the Indian parents’ side, arranged marriages, and with this the choice of partner, the avoidance of divorce and parenthood, the opposition to races mixing, interpreted as a reproduction of the caste system, and the idea of the exoticness of India still conform to the main stereotypes from the white perspective.

Although one of the main foci of study was the gender identity problems faced by the members of the British-female characters, I could not ignore the adolescence problems faced by the male characters like Dave in *Chapatti or Chips* (2000) and Joel in *Bindis and Brides* (2005) and the mistaken belief that their early loneliness will be fulfilled with sex in a hidden need for care and affection by the wrong means. Because they learn to care for someone unexpectedly and Indian girls also care for them friendship will turn into a love relationship. These male characters let the Indian family see beyond the strict pantomime of the Indian world, a stereotyped world full of rituals, ceremonies, flowers and colours that hides a cruel reality for some British Asian teenage girls. It is in these characters that the female protagonists find their strongest support as being different helps them see reality with a different light. The white and British Asian communities need each other in a symbolic escape from their most immediate surrounding.

Each character reacts to the conflicting demands of their condition in different ways, Chila in *Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (1999) leaving her husband on her

becoming a mother, Tania in *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (1999) rejecting her roots and betraying her friends through the unwilling portrayal of their lives, Naina in *Chapatti or Chips* (2000) being the first female character to marry a white man, Kareena in *Saris and Sins* (2003) through the transgression of the Indian rules of divorce, Marina in *Passion and Poppadoms* (2004) through culture and class clash, Zarleena in *Bindis and Brides* (2005) through the opening of her own business after separating from her husband, Jeena in *The Marriage Market* (2006) through a marriage of convenience, Saffron looking for her roots in India in *Tall, dark and handsome* (2008) and Sushi in *The Pocket Guide To Being An Indian Girl* (2004) creating her own pocket guide to life. The success of their actions find their mirror in the triumph of love over male vices as stereotyped by the white male characters Dave in *Chapatti or Chips* (2000) regarding sex, beer and football, Joel Winters in *Bindis and Brides* (2005) climbing and women, and with them, the fear of being attached to someone, Aaron in *The Marriage Market* (2006) overcoming an age, culture and honour gap and Cory concerning his position as a womaniser. Despite what has been stated above, and despite their British birth they are fully aware of conduct expectations and the difference between the periods before and after marriage, a heritage they cannot easily avoid, which reproduces the metaphor of conduct books. However the initial impression and the steps taken by a section of the Indian community in England, not all girls do away with a strict code of behaviour and, as a consequence, with the norms dictated by their parents' culture but have strong religious beliefs. In some cases it is a matter of personal options but in others of fear.

In spite of the changes in the second generation of British Asian teenagers and because of the complexity of the issue at hand, it is very difficult to establish a parallel and coherent line of evolution. Even in the books written by the same author, issues like marriage and identity conflict are considered from different angles and we cannot either state that the basic pillars of tradition have completely disappeared and that no prejudice exists as to, among other matters, identity and the parents' acceptance of their descendants' own choices.

In Nisha Minhas' novels we have noticed an evolution that moves from the question of infidelity and the existence of a rebellious wife who does not want to keep quiet, in her first novel to the queer relationship between two teenagers from different cultures and background but with a similar adolescence. All this passing through culture mixing in her third novel and the beatings and later divorce between Kareena and Samir in *Bindis and Brides* (2005); current concerns in contemporary society and that confirms that the novels stand as a re-presentation of society. The female British Asian characters and the white men not only live in a situation of loneliness but also feel afraid of being themselves and the first steps taken in the externalization of their feelings are a personal challenge. The parallel lines concerning a difficult adolescence and the necessity of breaking with their destiny, and as a consequence, the unsettling of the relationship with their parents or peers meet in the need to feel alive and to initiate a love relationship.

The transparency in the message sent from the second generation is portrayed in the denunciation of the hypocrisy stemming from idealised social and cultural conceptions that lack a reasonable justification. The British Asian female writers' message comes to the point that beyond the scope of tradition there exists a set of situations and experiences that are part of a new social, political and cultural order in need of a definition and universal knowledge. This new order needs to be known by the members of the first generation first and the British community later. In this context the objectives are not only that the individuals can choose and accomplish their own aspirations but, with this, break with the existing stereotypes and remove people's blinkers. This message requires, as maintained in this dissertation, a redefinition and negotiation of tradition and a specific personal, social or sexual conduct, a step some British Asian women have not had the courage to take.

The desire to reach a consensus involves action defined in terms of naturalness over artefact, thus, opposing "codified and externalised behaviours" (Armstrong and Tennenhouse 1987: 25) and challenging the idea that women can be produced according to prescribed norms and the conception of nurture over nature.

Although the authors gather some basic notions on sexual relationships, desire and fantasies, and the conversation flows naturally among the younger generations, it is still a taboo among the first and second generations. Indeed it is commented upon but is lacking in openness and freedom. The frivolity and irony in the references to safe sex together with hypocrisy become the norm not only in the early novels but also in the recently published ones. Despite all, it means a step forward as far as the explicit reference to sex, desire and, with them fantasies and dreams, barely existed both in female writers born and bred in India and the new stream of British Asian female writers.

As regards sexuality, homosexuality is fostered by the situation of oppression lived by some female characters leaving the individual no choice in his or her sexual preferences. Desire is socially and culturally associated and stereotyped with a member of the other sex in white culture. For the Indian code of conduct desire for a man other than the one chosen is not only forbidden but also punished. The attempt to transgress the code imprisons a manifestation of natural impulses codified and obscured for centuries.

While being one of the strongest features of South Asian society, religion is sometimes used strategically as a justification for a wrong action. Among the younger generations, religion is declining due to social interaction with the British.

A few months before the presentation of this thesis, the British Asian writer Rashmita Patel pointed out the reasons for her interest in British Asian issues as the basis for her novels, as indicated in section 3.2.4.7. These reasons, some of which I would like to recapitulate, coincide with several of the points gathered in this study. In the interview for the radio programme *Story time with* on the 'Midlands Masala' radio station on 18th September 2008, she mentioned that:

- There were not enough novels based on Western Asian cultural and social issues.

- This new literature pursues to innovate the current ethnic groups of similar backgrounds into more academic and educative habits which will enhance the academic achievements of those readers.
- Finally it tries to enable to see different views and understanding allowing equality and diversity to be expressed as the book is written in English so that not only the Asian target market can read it but other markets as well.

The lack of literature on Asian issues is represented in the primary bibliography with a clear reference to the lack of books that tell the individual about how to act in a situation of identity crisis without the family's moral support. The British Asian individual searches for answers to questions which are central to the human condition but that are difficult to solve in a hybrid culture. Given the impossibility of finding an answer in the Indian household due to the lack of communication, it creates the need to find someone to talk to, someone they can rely on. In *Tall, Dark and Handsome* (2007), Saffron, born to Indian parents but adopted by English ones, is caught in an identity crisis. Her British birth and upbringing do not carry the burden of Indian tradition but it creates misunderstanding around her and as she maintains, there is no guidebook about when white adopts brown, that is when white parents adopt a girl from India with a different skin colour. The writer herself also considered, as seen in Chapter 4, the lack of literature on interracial marriages. This fact hides concerns that are becoming more common in today's British society but are finding their place in the literary market. Despite the rules of tradition, there is no book about how to be a modern Indian girl. The ironic approach to tradition is provided by B.K. Mahal in *The Pocket Guide To Being An Indian Girl* (2004). It is, therefore, in the context of culture clash analysed in this thesis, that the character tries to reach a definition of the self and in order to achieve such an aim she has to construct her own rules through the observation of the *traditional gender injustices* around her.

The title of the thesis, "Gender, identity and tradition in Meera Syal, Nisha Minhas and B. K. Mahal: lights and shadows in *unwritten rules* of conduct", tackles key issues in a context of culture clash, gender, identity, tradition and as a consequence of the latter, conduct. As has been observed, in a contemporary multicultural society like

the British gender relations become controversial between the first and the second generation Indians. This controversy arises from the opposition between the old Indian ways and the new social and cultural reality, which requires a redefinition. Thus, the achievement of a dialogue between tradition in a move towards the future and the acceptance of the new individual's perceptions does not liberate the characters from personal risks and dangers. The inborn attachment to Western contemporary ways does not reject or look down on the Indian mode but involves a new message that meets the demands of a world in a continuous process of social, political and technological advance. The new message correlates with the awareness of the implication of a code of conduct kept through place and generations, and which they violate, with all its implications, and even worse, the moral weight of amalgamating two different identities into one.

The negotiating process maintained in this dissertation does not only include the Indian elders but also the rest of the Indian community, Western society and, more importantly, the self. In this context, the negotiating process and the consensus reached moves among three poles, first, tradition and contemporary attitudes, second, the values of the individual and the redefinition of their elders' and third, the values of the individual and the self-perception in the observation and distant identification with other British Asian teenagers born, like him or herself, in a Western society but with not associating with the Western way.

As has been observed *The laws of Manu* and *The Guru Granth Sahib* constitute by themselves codes of conduct. While most of the rules have been dictated through time and the members of the second generation are aware of the parents' respect of tradition, these rules cannot be applied to the British context. Being British by birth tradition cannot and should not justify the British Asian women's submission to the old canons of conduct. No rule, regarded in the title, as *unwritten rule*, can justify, among other issues, the elders' control over the individual, their judgement of the individual just because he or she was Indian or the difficulty in the accomplishment of gender duties. As British born citizens they demand a freedom that does not understand of

imposed rules of tradition brought from overseas. There is no written rule stating the imposition of the old Indian rules from the motherland on the British Asian individual.

The accomplishment of a consensus is not devoid of a number of lights and shadows in the relationships between the first and the second generation. The lights would be symbolically represented by characters like Naina, Marina, Zarleena or Jeena and the white characters like Dave or Aaron, and the shadows by those members from either group, Indian, British or British Asian, who, anchored in tradition, cannot see beyond the scope of the motherland, even though it is distant in time and location. Therefore, the subject's characters and attitudes stand as a symbolic representation of an ideology that can no longer be defined in terms of patriarchy but in terms of freedom, self and happiness. Notwithstanding, it is also worth saying that although there is still a lot to do, the first grains are being produced and collected. All the novels under analysis, to the exception of Meera Syal's *Anita and Me* (1996) concentrate on the time before marriage for reasons that respond to an age of confrontation that the characters react against, and that provides a gap of information in the early years despite the fact that there exists an implied code on right conduct.

The most interesting directions and important questions for future study?

- Comparative study of British Asian writers and female writers from other minority groups, Pakistani and Bangladeshi.
- Comparative study of the Calcutta-born writer shifting shifting between London and Delhi Vikhram Seth's *A suitable boy* (1990) and Nisha Minhas' production, possible evolution from the 1990's to 2007, year of Nisha Minhas' last book. They might provide an enriching portrayal of tradition creeds with a notable difference in time, place and gender dichotomy but which might point to a deeply and similarly rooted message in the rethinking of tradition.
- Any possible relationship between the new literature concerns and the music being produced by British Asians. In fact, recently a British composer and an

Indian singer have created *Masala*, a British Asian collaboration, “a vibrant music album with a mixture of sounds from all over the world” (AIM 14.04.2008)

- Research on the books being published from 2007 onwards by the new female writers Monica Ali, Begum Dina, Rahila Gupta, Nikita Lalwani, Roopa Farooki (Pakistani), Monica Pradhan, Sanjay Suri, Jasvinder Sanghera or Atul Shah and whose works are listed in Chapter 3.
- Comparative study of the British Asian female writers in England and Wales in a moment in which regionalism is fostered and see its impact in relation to the mainstream, its worries and concerns.

To the non-Asian reader the justification of the restriction of the individual’s freedom in all its spheres through tradition is nothing but difficult to understand.

It cannot be overlooked, however, that this study has certain limitations. The reasons for this statement are of a diverse nature. First and foremost the authors focus of this study are new writers that, apart from Meera Syal’s scholarly reception, and also with some limitations, have not still become the subject of scholarly attention. Although it is true that some research has been done on the literature of books of conducts, no study has been carried out in the treatment of gender relations and the approach to the primary bibliography in the line of conduct books as repeated in this thesis as regards the British Asian community. This fact involves a gap of information subject for further analysis and discussion for any researcher. Moreover, out of the bibliography available on the Indian community, not all the material that seemed worth looking at fulfilled the interests and needs of this research, and, surprising as it may seem, given the number and impact of the Indian and the British Asian community, it was hard to find data on some concerns affecting them. The finding of information also provided me with some contradictory results. The data within my reach, as a mode of example, mentioned Nisha Minhas’ involvement as a columnist for the newspaper *The Asian leader*. Nevertheless, the online version does not keep any result and as far as my task in London was concerned, I could not find any *The Asian leader* newspaper when I tried to find some clue on her collaboration, contrary to papers on other minority groups like the Pakistani

and the Irish that were within easy reach. With this the implication is not the veracity of the information but its paradoxes. It was not until a few months before the defence of this thesis that I came across some information about Nisha Minhas on the BBC reading project. It was the time when Dr. Sara Upstone was working on a book called *Twenty-first century voices: Contemporary British Asian fiction*, to be published by Manchester University Press in 2010.

In a nutshell, bringing these novels into critical comparison, despite the temporal gap and cultural borders between them, brings an awareness and understanding of the complications and identifications the characters travel through on the way to discovering themselves as human beings. The writers' portrayal of experiences they may have gone through or that they would have experienced given the importance of tradition over the individual's wishes shows the difficulty to set a homogenous line of thought. Nevertheless, they may open the way to a better understanding of the worries and concerns of the British Asian community and ease gender relations among the different groups. While *Anita and Me* (1996) offers an interesting reversal of perspectives, portraying the English through the eyes of the Indian diaspora (Branach-Kallas 2004: 40), later the novels reflect the new roles and attitudes towards modernity to the detriment of the Indian culture among the younger generations. The difficulty in the agreement between real and expected behaviour does not impede the possibility of gazing towards the future to the detriment of the past. Along the path the elaboration of *new rules* stems not only from the individual's experiences and development but also derives from the adoption of a reflexive and critical spirit.

This thesis is the result of a personal perception as an outsider whose opinion and views may be either right or wrong but that as a potential reader can perceive a reality with a perspective other than that of a British Asian citizen. The approach to the primary bibliography in the way done here also allows a peculiar and new perception in the watching of any documentary on the current situation in India and other related fields that moves beyond specific perceptions but that are based on and turn into a more solid and consolidate knowledge and reception.

This dissertation finishes with a quotation by the British writer Hanif Kureshi, a passage that sums up one of the key issues of this dissertation while allowing other possible interpretations, the importance of making the public be aware of realities that have no easy explanation and justification.

You would flatter yourself if you thought you could change things by a film or play or whatever, but perhaps you can contribute to a climate of idea (...) It is important to ask questions about how we live sexually, how we live racially, what our relations are with each other emotionally. Asking these questions seems to me to be the things artists can do rather than change society in any specific way.

Hanif Kureishi, *The late show* (TV credits BBC2 15.02.1989)

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- <<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/focuson/religion>>: It shows a picture of the different faith groups in the United Kingdom.
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- <<http://www.salidaa.org.uk/salidaa/site/Home>>: It is the project website.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1:**Structure of the *Laws of Manu***

The first chapter deals with the creation of the world by the deities, the divine origin of the book itself, and the objective of studying it. Chapters two to six recount the proper conduct of the members of the upper castes, their initiation into the Brahmin religion by sacred thread or sin-removing ceremony, the period of disciplined studentship devoted to the study of the Vedas under a Brahmin teacher, the chief duties of the householder - choice of a wife, marriage, protection of the sacred hearth-fire, hospitality, sacrifices to the gods, feasts to his departed relatives, along with the numerous restrictions and finally, the duties of old age. The seventh chapter talks of manifold duties and responsibilities of kings. The eighth chapter deals with the *modus operandi* in civil and criminal proceedings and of the proper punishments to be meted out to different caste. The ninth and the tenth chapters relate the customs and laws regarding inheritance and property, divorce and the lawful occupations for each caste. Chapter eleven expresses the various kinds of penance for the misdeeds. The final chapter expounds the doctrine of karma, rebirths and salvation.

Appendix 2:**Blair's letter to Asian women group (2007)**

I am writing to you because I know how effectively you have campaigned for action against forced marriages and your close involvement with Lord Lester in shaping his Private Member's Bill on this important issue. So I wanted to tell you personally about the Government's intention to support the Bill and to help strengthen the protections it gives to prevent people being married against their will.

Forced marriages are an inhuman and highly damaging practice and we are determined to take seriously our responsibility to prevent them and support the victims. As you will know, the Government has already made progress in this area.

We have already raised from 16 to 18 the age for gaining access to the UK for the purpose of marriage and are now consulting on increasing it again to 21. We have also set up the joint Foreign Office / Home Office Forced Marriage Unit (FMU), the only one of its type in the world. The FMU works closely with our consular offices and now helps around 300 victims of forced marriages a year. Some of those it helps are as young as ten.

But the Government has also accepted that more needs to be done. Forced marriages are already against the law but a national consultation exercise last year strongly suggested that specifically criminalising them might not be effective so we have looked to see how better use of existing legislation, civil remedies and the family courts could increase protection.

Lord Lester's Bill, which you have helped draft, is very much along these lines. By extending the reach of the Family Law Act, it will give the courts powers to prevent forced marriages or, where one has already taken place, to remove the victim to safety. Breaches of injunctions would be contempt of court and could lead to arrest. The Bill would also enable relatives and friends to appeal to the court for protection of the victim in a forced marriage.

The Government has also worked with Lord Lester to strengthen and widen protections against forced marriages from the original proposals in the Bill. This, in particular, includes tougher action against third parties who can help coerce people into marriage.

The overall impact of the Bill will be to make it easier to protect victims and for the courts to intervene to stop this illegal activity.

Government support for the Bill, of course, means that these added and much needed protections now have a much greater chance of becoming law. I am very pleased that we have been able to work with you on these proposals and believe they will have a big impact in stamping out this cruel practice.

Tony Blair

Sent to:

Southall Black Sisters

Ashiana Network

Rights of Women Refuge

Hounslow Domestic Violence Network

Asian Family Counselling Service


Khatun Sapnara

IMKAAN and

Newham Asian Women's Project.


Appendix 3:

ImaginAsian at Harrow Library:



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 ANAND, Mulk Raj Untouchable
 BALASUBRAMANYAM, Rajeev In Beautiful Disguises
 BASU, Kunal The Opium Clerk
 CHAND, Meira A Far Horizon
 CHANDRA, Vikram Love and Longing in Bombay
 CHANDRARATNA, Bandula An Eye for an Eye
 CHANDRARATNA, Bandula Mirage

CHAUDHURI, Amit Freedom Song
 CHAUDHURI, Amit A New World
 CHAUDHURI, Amit A Strange and Sublime Address
 CHAUDHURI, Amit Three Novels
 CHAUDHURI, Amit (editor) Picador Book of Modern Indian
 DESAI, Anita Baumgartner's Bombay
 DESAI, Anita Diamond Dust and Other Stories
 DESAI, Anita Fasting, Feasting

DESAI, Anita The Village By the Sea
 DESAI, Kiran Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard
 DHARMARAJAN, Geeta Separate Journeys: stories by Indian writers
 DIVAKARUNI, Chitra Banerjee The Mistress of Spices
 GOKHALE, Namita The Book of Shadows
 GUPTA, Sunetra A Sin of Colour
 GURNAH, Abdulrazak Admiring Silence
 HAMEED, Yasmin So That You Can Know Me – 17 stories by Pakistani women

HARIHARAN, Githa The 1000 Faces of the Night
 HARIHARAN, Githa When Dreams Travel
 HUSSEIN, Aamer (ed) Hoops of Fire, stories by Pakistani women
 HUSSEIN, Abdullah Émigré Journeys
 HYDER, Qurratulain River of Fire
 JARIWALA, Angela Pardesi
 JHA, Raj Kamal The Blue Bedspread
 JHABVALA, Ruth Praver East Into Upper East

JHABVALA, Ruth Praver Heat and Dust
 KALI FOR WOMEN, Truth Tales 2, contemporary writing by Indian women
 KAPUR, Manju Difficult Daughters
 KHARE, Randhir Notebook of a Foot Soldier and Other Stories
 KUREISHI, Hanif Buddha of Suburbia
 LAHIRI, Jhumpa Interpreter of the Maladies
 MAAS, Sharon Of Marriageable Age
 MEER, Ameena Bombay Talkie
 MISHRA, Jaishree Ancient Promises

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ImaginAsian – English Titles



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 MISTRY, Rohinton Tales from Firozsha Baag
 MUKHERJEE, Bharati Jasmine
 MUKHERJEE, Bharati Leave it to Me
 MUKHERJEE, Ruchira Toad in My Garden
 NAGARKAR, Kiran Cuckold
 NAMJOSHI, Siniti Mothers of Maya Diip
 NARAYAN, R.K. The Batchelor of Arts

NARAYAN, R.K. Malgudi Days
 NARAYAN, R.K. Man-eater of Malgudi
 NARAYAN, R.K. Mr. Sampath – the Printer of Malgudi
 NARAYAN, R.K. The Painter of Signs
 NARAYAN, R.K. Swami and Friends
 NARAYAN, R.K. Talkative Man
 NARAYAN, R.K. Under the Banyan Tree
 NARAYAN, R.K. Vendor of Sweets

NARAYAN, R.K. Waiting for the Mahatma
 PADMANABHAN, Manjula Getting There (part fiction, part memoir)
 PADMANABHAN, Manjula Hot Death, Cold Soup
 PERERA, Shyama Bitter Sweet Symphony
 PERES DA COSTA, Suneeta Homework
 ROY, Arundhati The God of Small Things
 RUSHDIE, Salman Haroun and the Sea of Stories
 SELVADURAI, Shyam Funny Boy

SETH, Vikram A Suitable Boy
 SHAHRAZ, Qaisra The Holy Woman
 SHARMA, Akhil An Obedient Father
 SINGH, Ajay Give 'em Hell, Hari
 SIVANANDAN, A When Memory Dies
 SIVANANDAN, A Where the Dance Is
 SYAL, Meera Anita and Me
 SYAL, Meera Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee



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New Titles Spring 2002

- AHMAD-ul-UMRI The Lady of the Lotus
 ANAND, Mulk Raj Untouchable
 ARASANAYAGAM, Jean In the Garden Secretly and Other Stories
 ASHOKAMITRAN, Water, a Novella
 BALDWIN, Shauna Singh What the Body Remembers
 BANDYOPADHYAY, Manik Wives and Others
 CHANDRA, Vikram Love and Longing in Bombay
 CHATTERJEE, Sarat Chandra Palli Samaj (The Homecoming)
 CHATTERJEE Sarat Chandra Pather Dabi (The Right of Way)
 CHATTERJEE, Upamanyu English August – An Indian Story
 CHUGTAI, Ismat The Heart Breaks Free + The Wild One
 CHUGTAI, Ismat Lifting the Veil
 CHUGTAI, Ismat The Quilt and Other Stories
 DAS, Manoj The Escapist
 DAS, M. Selected Fiction
 DE, Shobha Second Thoughts
 DE, Shobha Sisters
 DE, Shobha Snapshots
 DE, Shobha Socialite Evening
 DE, Shobha Speedpost
 DE, Shobha Strange Obsession
 DE, Shobha Sultry Days
 DE SOUZA, Eunice Dangerlok
 GANGULI, Sumanta Fighting Shadows
 GHOSH, Amitav Countdown
 GHOSH, Amitav The Shadow Lines
 GHOSH, Chandan The Sky is Blue
 GOKHALE, Namita Gods, Graves and Grandmother
 GUSTAD, Kaizad Of No Fixed Address
 IYER, Suguna The Evening Gone
 JI Mantriji Diaries of Shri Suryaprakash Singh Vols 1 & 2 (Based on the original 'Yes Minister')
 JOSHI, Suresh Ten Short Stories
 KAPUR, Vikram Time is a Fire
 KUMAR, S (Editor) Hindi Short Stories
 KUTTY, Madhavan The Village Before Time
 LAL, Ranjit Life and Times of Altu-Faltu

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MEMON, Muhammad Umar An Epic Unwritten
 MALGONKAR, Manohar Dropping Names
 MASTUR, Khadija Inner Courtyard (Aangan)
 MATHUR, Anurag The Inscrutable Americans
 MATHUR, Anurag Scenes from an Executive Life
 MISRA, Jaishree Accidents Like Love and Marriage
 Modern Hindi Stories
 NAHAL, Chaman Azadi
 NAIR, Preethi Gypsy Masala
 NASRIN, Taslima Lajja (Shame)
 NAYAR, Rana (translator) Parsa (Gurdial Singh)
 NIRANJCHANA, Shakti In the Web of Silk and Gold
 PENGUIN Book of Classical Indian Love Stories and Lyrics
 PENGUIN Book of Modern Indian Short Stories
 PAYNE, Peggy Sister India,
 PREMCHAND Nirmala
 RAO, R. Raj One Day I Locked My Flat in Soul City
 RAO, Ranga The River is Three Quarters Full
 RAY, Satyajit The Incredible Adventures of Professor Shonku
 RAY, Satyajit Stranger
 RUSHDIE, Salman Vintage Book of Ancient Writing 1947 –1997
 SAHGAL, Nayantara Rich Like Us
 SAHGAL, Nayantara This Time of Morning
 SAHNI, Bhisham Madhavi
 SAHNI, Bhisham Tamas
 SAHNI, Bhisham (editor) Middle India: Selected Short Stories
 SARIF, Shamin The World Unseen
 SHAKTI, Niranjchana The Web of Silk and Gold
 SHARMA, Ramachandra Home and Away
 SIDHWA, Bapsi Ice Candy Man (Filmed as 1947)
 SINGH, Ashok The Snake Gods
 SINGH, Kushwant Collected Stories
 SRIVASTAVA, Atima Looking for Maya
 TAYLOR, Philip Meadows Confessions of a Thug
 VAN BUITENEN, J.A.B. Tales of Ancient India
 VASUDEVAN NAIR, M.T. The Demon Seed
 WILSON, John The Tehelka Trap

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New Titles Autumn 2002

ABOOBAKER, Sara Breaking Ties
 ANTONY, Shinnie Barefoot and Pregnant
 APTE, Suren Bai of Hatonde
 ARASANAYAGAM, Jean Dividing Line
 ARIF, M Dreamy Traveller
 BANKER, Ashok Bollywood
 BAUDAMI, Anita Rau Tamarind Mem
 CHATTERJEE, Monish Ranjan Balika Badhu
 CHUGTAI, Ismat Heart Breaks Free
 DAS, Sisir Bride for Jangannatha
 DEVY, G.N. Painted Words
 GAHLAUT, Among the Chatterati
 GOKHALE, Nimita Gods, Graves and Grandmother
 GOONERATNE, Yasmine Masterpieces
 GROVER, Pramod Wedding Gift
 KAPUR, Vikram Time is a Fire
 KUMAR, Ajaya Embers
 LAKSHMI, Vijay Pomegranite Dreams
 MALGONKAR, Manshar Dropping Names
 MANSINGH, Jasjit Time Out
 MUKHERJEE, Alison Nirmal Babu's Bride
 NAIR, M. T. Vasudevan Demon Seed and Other Writings
 NAMBISAN, Kavary On Wings of Butterfly
 NAYAR, R. From Across the Shores
 RAMANUNNI, K What the Sufi Said
 RATHORE, Ameeta Blood Ties
 ROY-BHATTACHARYA, Joydeep Gabriel Club
 SIDDIQUI, Safia Golden Cage
 SINGH, Avtar Beauty of These Present Things
 VAS, Juis S.R. Modern Goan Short Stories
 ZAMAN, Fakhar (ed) Pakistani Women Writers – Short Stories

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- AHMAD, Dr Syed Aziz Fruit and Vegetable Juice Therapy 613.2
 AL-JAWHAF MUHAMMAD Mahud A Simple Guide to Muslim Prayers 297.382
 ANAND, Vidya Indian Heroes and Heroines of World War 2 355.154
 BABU, Suresh Green Remedies 615.32
 BADAUNI, Shaheel Selected Poems 891.4391
 BERINSTAIN, Valerie Mughal India 954.025
 BHARADWAJ, Monisha Indian Beauty Secrets 646.72
 BHARADWAJ, Monisha Indian Kitchen 641.5954
 BUONAVENTURA, Wendy Beauty and the East 646.72
 BUTALIA, Urvashi Other Side of Silence – Voices from the Partition 954.04
 CASE, Doug Let's Speak English 428.24
 CHATTERJEE, Debjani Redbeck Anthology of British South Asian Poetry 821.91408
 COOPER, Ilay Arts and Crafts of India 709.54
 COOPER, Ilay Painted Towns of Shekhavati 751.53
 CRAVEN, Roy C Indian Art – A Concise History 709.54
 DALAL, Tarla Achaar aur Parathe 641.5954
 DALAL, Tarla Baby and Toddler Cookbook 641.5954
 DALAL, Tarla Snacks in Under Ten Minutes 641.5954
 DAS GUPTA, Minakshie Calcutta Cookbook 641.5954
 DESAI, Mahadev Gospel of Selfless Action: Gita According to Gandhi 294.5
 DHARKER, Imtiaz I Speak for the Devil 821 DHARK
 DOGRA, R.C. Thought Provoking Hindu Names 929.4
 DOGRA, R.C. Thought Provoking Sikh Names 929.4
 DUGGAL, Kartar Singh Sikh Gurus 294.553
 FRENCH, P Liberty or Death: India's Journey to Independence & Division 954.03
 GANDHI, Maneka Penguin Book of Hindi Names 929.4
 GILLOW, John Traditional Indian Textiles 746
 GUPTA, Subhadra Sen Devi-Devata: the Gods and Goddesses of India 294.5
 GUPTA, Subhadra Sen Tirtha – Holy Pilgrim Centres of the Hindus 294.5
 HARDY, Justine Bollywood Boy 791.43
 HARDY, Justine Scoop Wallah, Life on a Delhi Daily 915.4
 HUSAIN, Shahnaz Beauty Book 646.72
 JAFFREY, Madhur Foolproof Indian Cookery 641.5954
 JAFFREY, Madhur A Taste of India 641.5954
 JAIN, B. L. Yogic Cure to Avoid Heart Surgery 616.12
 JAIN, Shreshi Prabha Benares ki Raoi 641.5954
 KABIR, Nasreen Munni Bollywood: Indian Cinema Story 791.430954
 KABRA, Kanchan G Gujarat Cookbook 641.5954
 KABRA, Kanchan G Paneer Cookbook 641.5954
 KAPOOR, Sanjeev Khazana of Healthy, Tasty Recipes 641.5954
 KAPOOR, Sanjeev Low Calorie Vegetarian Cookbook 641.5954
 KAPUR, Madhoor Pradakshina, Travels in India 915.4
 KELLY, Thomas L Kathmandu, Pokhra, Chitwan 915.496
 KHALSA, Gurmukh Kaur 8 Human Talents: Yoga Way to Restore Balance & Serenity
 613.72
 KHALVATI, Mimi Selected Poems 821 KHALV
 KHAN, Maulana W Introducing Islam 297
 KHAN-DIN, Ayub East is East 822 KHAN
 KNAPPERT, Jan Indian Mythology 299.5

- KATMER, Juan Carlos Krishnamurti for Beginners 181.4
 LYNTON, Linda The Sari 391.00954
 MACMILLAN, Margaret Women of the Raj 954.03
 MEHTA, Gita Snakes and Ladders: Glimpses of Modern India 954.05
 MEHTA, Nita Indian Vegetarian Cookbook 641.5954
 MICHEL, George Hindu Art and Architecture 709.54
 NAIPAUL, V. S. Letters Between a Father and Son B/NAIPAUL
 NAMJOSHI, Suniti Because of India 821 NAMJOS
 NAYLOR, Nicola Jasmine and Arnica 915.4
 NEKI, Jaswant Singh Pilgrimage to Hemkunt 294.553
 PAINE, Sheila Embroidery from India & Pakistan 746.44
 PANJABI, Camellia 50 Great Curries of India 641.5954
 PATIL, Vimla What's in Your Name? Indian Baby Names and Their Roots 929.4
 RAHEJA, Dinesh 100 Luminaries of Indian Cinema 791.430954
 RAVISHANKAR, N.S. Yoga for Health 613.72
 ROYLE, Trevor Last Days of the Raj 954.03
 SAIGAL, Mohan Hindustani Kitchen 641.5954
 SAIGAL, Mohan Vegetarian Hindustani Kitchen 641.5954
 SATYANAND, Mohit Nepal 915.496
 SHANKAR, Archana Khajuraho Orchha 726.1
 SUSHMA Vegetarian Indian Homestyle Cooking 641.5954
 SINGH, Chitralekha & NATH, Prem Hindu Festivals, Faiths, Fasts 294.5
 SINGH, Khushwant Sights and Sounds of the World 910.4
 SINGH, Mohinder Anandphur, the City of Bliss 294.553
 SINGH, Mohinder The Golden Temple 726.146
 SINGH, Raghubir Calcutta: the Home and the Street 915.4
 TODIWALA, Cyrus Café Spice – Namaste 641.5954
 TOMAR, Alok Ji Mantriji Vols 1 & 2 (Yes Minister) 827
 VARADARAJAN, Viji Samayal, Pleasures of South Indian Vegetarian Cooking
 641.5954
 VERMA, Mona Eating at Home, Exciting Recipes for Every Occasion 641.5954
 VISRAM, Rozina Asians in Britain – 400 Years of History 305.800942
 VYAS, Bharti Beauty Wisdom 646.72
 VYAS, Bharti Simply Ayurveda 615.53
 VYAS, Bharti Simply Radiant 613
 WATSON, Francis India: a Concise History 954
 WAZA, Wazwaan Traditional Kashmiri Cuisine 641.5954
 WILLIAMS, Raymond Brady Introduction to Swaminarayan Hinduism 294.5

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ImaginAsian – English Titles Non-Fiction
New Titles Autumn 2002

- 294.5 GUPTA, Subhadra Sen Devi-Devata – Gods & Goddesses of India
 297 BUSOOL, Assad Guide for the Young Muslim. Books 1 & 2
 297 THANVI, Ashraf Ali Muslim way of Life
 297.36 KAZARZAI, Danish Great Festivals of India
 305.8914 MARTIN, John Asian Leicester
 306.7 SINGH, Khushwant Women, Love and Lust
 613.2 KAPUR, Kavita Fine Dining the Low Calorie Way
 615.532 RAMESH, Gita Ayurvedic Herbal Massage
 618.24 DALAL, Tarla Pregnancy Cookbook
 641.5954 DALAL, Tarla Cooking with 1 Teaspoon of Oil
 641.5954 DALAL, Tarla Pulaos and Biryanis
 641.5954 GULATI, Roopa Good Morning India Cookbook
 641.5954 JAIN, Shashi P. Benaras ki Rasoi
 641.5954 KABRA, Kanchan Gujarat Cookbook
 641.5954 KABRA, Kanchan Paneer Cookbook
 641.5954 KUTTAIAH, Raneer Vijaya Cuisines from Tamil Nadu
 641.5954 MEHTA, Nita Punjabi Khaana
 641.5954 MEHTA, Nita Quick Vegetarian Cooking
 641.5954 MENEZES, Maria Teresa Great Goan Cooking
 641.5954 MOHAN, Rocky Art of Indian Cuisine
 641.5954 PATIL, Vimla Festival Cookbook
 641.5954 RADHAKRISHNA, Subita Aharam – Traditional Cooking of Tamil Nadu
 641.5954 RAJAYER, Sandhya Healthy Cooking
 641.5954 REDDY, Kavitha Indian Soy Cookbook
 641.5954 SAIGAL, Mohan Hindustani Kitchen
 641.5954 VERMA, Mona Eating Out at Home
 641.595493 RATNATUNGA, Manel Sri Lankan Cookery
 746.44 CRILL, Rosemary Indian Embroidery
 746.6 MATHUR, A. Woven Wonder, Tradition of Indian Textiles
 746.6 NAT. INST. OF FASHION TECHNOLOGY Textiles and Crafts of India
 751.7 CHAKRAVERTY, Anjan Indian Miniature Painting
 786.8 AGGARWAL, Vikas How to Play Tabla
 791.43 BAC SOMAAYA, Bhawsana Amitabh
 791.430233 DWYER, Rachel Yash Chopra
 791.430954 BHAKTAL, Satyajit Spirit of Lagan
 791.430954 100 Stars of Indian Cinema
 796.358 MURRAY, Peter Sachin Tendulkar
 915.4 SEN, Antara Dev India, the Eternal Magic
 915.483 SHANKAR, Ravi Kerala
 915.496 KELLY, Thomas L Kathmandu, Pokhra, Chitwan
 915.44 MEHRA, Sunil Rajasthan
 954 KEAY, John India Discovered
 954.04 DAS, Gurcharan India Unbound

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Appendix 4:**Biographies:**

In this section I include some biographical data of the female writers analysed in this paper and a table concerning their works. The objective of the table is to facilitate the reader's understanding of the books for their complexity, expanded and complemented with more theoretical and practical work in the paper.

Meera Syal (1962-)

Born and brought up in Wolverhampton, England in 1962, soon after her highly educated parents arrived in the West Midlands from Delhi, years later she became a successful writer, actress, playwright, comic, and singer.

Proud of her Indian roots and culture, aware of her racial differences from an early age, and desperate to fit in, she was not a victim of racism at school, but was picked on because she was 'mouthy'. As she once said "I'd grown up with the lads in the yard, I'd hit anyone if they called me names... we were all at the bottom of the social pile. We had that in common." Back at home she lived in a little India, a world preserved by her parents and an extended family of aunties and uncles who weren't blood relatives but connected by something deeper, India. As a child she always felt part of her this thing called family, and this place called India.

From a young age Meera wanted to do something creative with her life but did not feel that she could. Her parents had hoped for her to become a doctor. When she told them at 15, that she did not want a career in medicine, her parents accepted it. But her father gave her some advice 'Whatever you do, be bloody good at it, better than the white person next to you. That's the way it is.' She went to a traditional, all-girls grammar school.

She instead studied English and Drama at Manchester University and got a double first. However, she did not do much acting at university. Meera wrote a play for herself, *One of Us*, a story about a young Asian girl who runs away from home because

she wants to be an actress. She rejects her parents and becomes intoxicated with her white friend, Carol. She says this is a trap she fell into herself. "There was a long time that I wanted to have blonde hair, recalled Tracey and go out with boys." At the end of the play the girl meets her mother again, who tells her something she'd never realised before. "I let you go because I knew when you were ready, you would come back."

Meera took the play to the Edinburgh Festival, and that same year it won the National Student Drama Award. She acted in London at the Royal Court Theatre, before receiving a call from the BBC, who were looking for an Asian woman to co-write a script. She took up the BBC's offer, and wrote *My Sister Wife*, a 3, part BBC television series. She next wrote a film for Channel 4, 'Bhaji on the Beach', which received mixed reviews. It was complimented for its realistic portrayal of the lives of British Asian women, while criticised for the apparent negative representations of Asian men, a few seen as controlling and dominant wife-beaters.

She then went on to write her first novel *Anita and Me* (1996), about a young girl growing up in the English Midlands during the 1970s. Meena is 12 years old and lives in the village of Tollington, "the jewel of the Black Country" in 1972. She is the daughter of Indian parents who have come to England to give her a better life. Her idyllic adolescence, surrounded by eccentric relatives and friends, is interrupted by the arrival in Tollington of Anita Rutter and her dysfunctional family. At 14 blonde, aloof, beautiful, and outrageous and sassy- Anita is everything Meena thinks she wants to be. Meena wheedles her way into Anita's life, but the arrival of a baby brother, teenage hormones, impending entrance exams for the posh grammar school and a motorcycling rebel without a future, threaten to turn her salad days sour.

Meera is still heard on BBC radio, in a variety of formats, comedy (Goodness Gracious Me; *The World As We Know It*, 1999), drama (*Legal Affairs*, 1996) and variety shows. She is also a journalist and writes for quality newspapers such as the *Guardian* (30/6/98). She has made guest appearances on a wide range of programmes, *Room 101* (August 99), *Late Lunch* (3/2/99) and 'Ruby' (1997) but has also had cameo roles in 'Absolutely Fabulous' ("New Best Friend", 1994) and 'Drop The Dead Donkey' (1996). She also starred in the BBC sitcom 'Keeping Mum' (1998). Her works for TV

include Goodness Gracious Me (1998-1999), Room 101, (1999), The Book Quiz, (1998), Keeping Mum, (1998), Ruby, (1997), Drop The Dead Donkey, (1996), Band of Gold, (1995), Degrees of Error (1995), The Brain Drain (1993), Absolutely Fabulous (1994) ('New Best Friend'), Sean's Show, 1993, The Real McCoy, Have I Got News For You, 1992, 1993, 1999. As to filmography, Girls' Night (1997), Beautiful Thing (1996), Crossing The Floor (1996) (TV), Flight, (1995) (TV), Gummed Labels (1992) (TV), No Crying He Makes (1988) (TV), Sammie and Rosie Get Laid (1987), A Little Princess (1986) (TV).

Novels by Meera Syal:

Works	Female characters	Male characters	Topics
<i>AM</i> (1996)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meena - Anita Rutter - Tracey [Anita's sister] - Nanina [Meena's grandmother] - Meena's mother [only Punjabi girl suffered culture shock in the 60s] - Mrs Worrall [adjoining neighbour] - The Ballwearings (town women working in metal factory) - The Aunties - Fat Rally and Sherrie [Anita's friends] - Baby and Pinky [Anita's cousins] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Robert [Meena's first boyfriend, gives her strength and self-confidence] - Hairy Neddy [leader of the boys' gang (Dave, Tonio, Gary)] - Sam Lowbridge [the yard's bad boy] - The Poet =Dave (a member of the boys' gang] - Meena's brother. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Culture clash in childhood - Friendship - Hybrid identity - Awareness of the possibility of choice. - Racism and prejudice. - Hard development of the individual made more conscious for culture difference, and achievement of independence. -parents history [Partition] - Displacement in time and place.The Motherland. - Death - Bad manners and conduct of the English. - Beatings on an English woman.

Works	Female characters	Male characters	Topics
<i>LHH</i> (1999)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tania [artist] - Chila - Sunita - Divorcee Auntie - Mrs Wilkinson [had a hard life but never complained] - Beronze, Suki 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Deepak [married to Chila] - Akkash [married to Sunita, a business success more interested in his work than in his marriage, lack of communication in the couple] - Martin [a gag writer before and an artist now, Tania's partner] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rebellion - Marriage - Dual culture. - Racial prejudice - Friendship betrayal. - Belonging/Refusal of roots/Identity crisis. - Racial prejudice. - Gender conflict. - Desire to be part of the mainstream. - culture change - (lesbianism)

B. K. Mahal

B.K. Mahal grew up in Derby, where she still lives with her family and where she regularly visited her local library with her father and siblings. She enjoyed modern British fiction, but could find nothing that reflected the lives of those born to immigrant parents.

The Pocket Guide To Being An Indian Girl, B.K. her first novel, was written to fill the gap. In narrating the life of a second generation Indian teenager, B.K. Mahal forces us to reckon with our own stereotypes of otherness. In her own words, she is “sick of victim literature” which focuses only on culture clash, rebellion and identity confusion. Nor does she wish to act as a spokesperson for her generation: she speaks from the margins of her community rather than for it.

B.K. Mahal drew from her own family background when writing *The Pocket Guide*. Her own father suffered a mental illness five years ago, and the experiences of her family coping with this illness profoundly influenced the book. Through the character of Susham's father, whose life of hard work has not reaped the rewards of his more affluent counterparts, B.K. Mahal depicts the poorer Indian underclass that is so under-represented in both mainstream and Asian media. After studying English

Literature and Media at the De Montfort University in Leicester, she began work on *The Pocket Guide To Being An Indian Girl* and gained a PGCE. She works as a primary teacher is currently writing a sequel.

Novel by B.K. Mahal, the only one published:

Female characters	Male characters	Topics
Sushi's mother (over-protective, over-burdening, over-annoying Indian mother)	Sushi's father (he suffers from a mental illness, he has affinity and trust with Sushi. She always helps him contrary to his family who always leave him in the lurch)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Culture clash -Defence of a teenager identity regardless of Indianness - Reality vs fiction for Indian women both in daily life and the involvement in the arts.
Sushi (protagonist and conflicting relations with people around her for her behaviour except her father)	Budgie (Sushi's brother)	- attempt to overcome family and tradition barriers in search for
Kully (sister, she is about to marry the man chosen for her)	Pardeep (Kully's husband-to-be as chosen by her parents)	-The need for a redefinition of education in the Indian context.
Worzel and Bimla(Sushi's stirring and annoying aunts)	Indy (Budgie's friend)	
Sammy and Pinky (Sushi's cousins, better Indian girls than her)		
Kiz (sister, she wants to become an Indian film actress and treats Sushi according to her own wishes. She cannot distinguish between reality and dreams)		

Nisha Minhas

On the arrival of her Sikh parents from India in the sixties the only English words she knew were ‘corner shop’ and ‘Buckingham Palace’. After just ten minutes in England they had picked up another word, ‘Paki’. Times were hard, but living in India was harder. Soon, after settling in a pleasant town in North Hertfordshire, her parents decided to have children, two girls and one boy, she being the youngest. Before long they had all grown up and her room was covered in Duran Duran posters. She was scared of having an arranged marriage with a man chosen by her parents. Someone who looked fine on the outside, but when he got her indoors, became Mr Discipline. Ordering her around, cleaning up after him, serving the master; her becoming less and less her as days went by. Him becoming more and more of a monster as days went by. onwards. She left home and settled down with her partner in Milton Keynes. After seeking out books dealing with the life of the British-born Asian, she found most of the Indian novels seemed to deal with life in India, or in the past. Her works include *Chapatti or Chips* (2002), *Saris and Sins* (2003), *Passion and Poppadoms* (2004), *Bindis and Brides* (2005), *The Marriage Market* (2006) and *Tall, Dark and Handsome* (2007)

While her first novel, *Chapatti or Chips* involves contrast, choice and clash between two options [far more than in the other novels], in *Saris and Sins* and *Passion and Poppadoms* there is the union of two concepts that if initially do not seem to be able to go together, they become the main topic in Minhas’ novels. *Passion and Poppadoms* is not so much concerned with the idea of arranged marriage, although it is mentioned on some occasions, but on the approach of two people initially separated by origin and social status. It is focused on what could be labelled as the false infidelity of Thomas Harding, an Oxford University student, a millionaire who drives a Porche and goes out with a blonde girl defined as a “perfect packaging”, a boy characterised by his reluctance to “jump into the minefield of marriage” (*P and P* 2004: 9) with Marina, an Indian girl; the “true friendship” between Marina and Emily, who make a plan to get to know Thomas; false appearances [Stuart]; the complicated relationship between Marina and her parents and the role played by Victoria, Thomas’ mother. The latter plays a secondary but an important role in the acceptance of the sentimental relationship of her

son with an Indian girl of a much lower status than themselves. The whole story is framed within the advantages of resorting to humour-Marina's grandmother advice of throwing Gange's water over a man's head to get him.

Appendix 5:**Synopsis of the novels studied in this thesis:**

The summaries are in a chronological order by the publication year. Thus, the oldest book was published by Meera Syal, *Anita and Me* (1996), and the most recent one by Nishan Minhas, *Tall, Dark and Handsome* (2007), which closes the corpus; B. K. Mahal would be in between as her only book was published in 2004.

***Anita and Me* (1996), Meera Syal.**

It is the story of nine-year-old Meena, the daughter of the only Punjabi family in the Midlands' mining village of Tollington. The novel provides a vision of British childhood in the 1960s, a childhood caught between two cultures, each on the brink of enormous change and where she cannot find a place for herself.

While her parents, more concerned about stopping her fibbing, thieving, and generally wayward behaviour than listening to her unconventional plans for the future, wish she could be like her cousins Pinky and Baby, sweet, docile, school-loving Indian girls, Meena's hyperactive imagination spurs her toward a life of drama, danger, blue jeans, garden gnomes and fish fingers. In this context, she falls in with a local rebel, meets Anita Rutter, who has a dog called nigger, and seems to find in Meena a fellow outsider who isn't scared of an adventure.

Meena's story is a journey towards discovering her own strength, and her growing identification with the struggles of her parents, and her brave grandmother, is part of this process. The myths of childhood will gradually dissolve in the form of, among others, a broken friendship, disappointments, the difficulty to fit or the discovery of death in the form of a young boy.

Novels by Nisha Minhas:

Works	Female character	White male	Friendship	Betrayal	Parents beliefs	Topics
<i>Ch or Ch</i> (2000)	Naina (about to marry Ashok)	Dave (womaniser, abandoned by mother, obsessed with sex)	Sonia (Naina's sister) Leen (Indian friend) Kate (English friend) Froggy (Naina's friend)	Dave (unfaithful with a friend's girlfriend and breaks a friendship pact. Froggy advises him.)	Traditional	- arranged marriage and later unfaithfulness with the real loved man. -conduct (sexuality included) -inner battle/fear
<i>S and S</i> (2003)	Kareena (married to Samir)	Jordan (ex-prisoner, in love with Cloey, unfaithful, tense relationship with Cloey's mother, Aileen)	Gilbert (Samir's friend but Samir does not listen to his advice on his marriage and unfaithfulness)	- Cloey (Samir's mistress) - Zara (one of Jordan's girlfriends)	Traditional	-false belief of love growth after marriage -identity crisis -parents betrayal -Marrying a woman from a different culture did not mean having betrayed parents.
<i>P and P</i> (2004)	Marina (parents choose her way)	Thomas (Nicole-girlfriend, an achiever of his dreams, social class)	Emily Nathan		-parents let daughter make her own choices but this included all decisions in life.	-own choice of husband -culture and social clash -seduction

Works	Female character	White male	Friendship	Betrayal	Parents beliefs	Topics
<i>B and B</i> (2005)	Zarleena (another victim of an unhappy arranged marriage married to Armin, divorces from him). Money (her sister)	Joel Winters (a womaniser)		-Eloise (Joel's sister. Girl number 1 in his life who is envious of his girlfriends as she isn't cared for by him any more and who is capable of inventing pregnancy) -Claudia (Joel's girlfriends. She does not know about his unfaithfulness)	Traditional parents but after their daughters failed marriage they reach a consensus.	- Unfaithfulness -achievement of personal and economic independence by a British-Asian woman. - Achievement of divorce. - false appearances
<i>The MM</i> (2006)	Jeena (single)	Aaron (has no parents because of an accident)	---	---	Traditional but final acceptance of marriage of their daughter with a white man.	Friendship marriage for an Indian girl not to be sent to India.
<i>TDH</i> (2007)	Saffron Harris (single)	Cory (established an orphanage in India. He is involved in the porn industry)	Jenica (Cory's friend) Flint Simonds	- Cory with Jenica. - Saffron herself with false expectations and towards her parents.	Rose, Cory's mother (change vision porn industry)	- Adoption of an Indian girl by white parents. - Cory's investment on children in India to relieve personal pain and experience after personal failure.

Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee (1999), Meera Syal.

This book is a clear example of the choices women have to make so as to define their identity as Indian women and overcome the barriers set on their way to achieve their objectives in life. Thus, it is through the development of three friends, Chila, Tania and Sunita that Syal shows different perspectives of such redefinition and the different ways of escape. Born in England; Chila is married to Deepak and is characterised by acceptance of tradition, only in the beginning though, Sunita, married to Akkash is unable to recognise the failure of her marriage in public, and Tania personifies the individual's responsibility of his/her actions. Wishing to become a mainstream writer despite the difficulties involved Tania blames herself for everything that goes wrong contrary to Chila. Chila's parents offer her everything which was expected from an Indian woman such as husband submission and attention to tradition. As to Sunita, first she had to get an education and then think about marriage, if she wanted. Thus, their development is shaped by factors such as their expectations as Indian women, that is, their Hindu culture and traditions, the coexistence in a society which is initially alien to the way they have been brought up, their desire to break the rules and be themselves.

These factors will determine their relationships with other people, either Indian or British, in terms of cultural duality and identity. Such relationships will be characterised by conflicts and contradictions that will be expressed by means of linguistic devices. It cannot be forgotten that these women are creating a new culture. As Tania maintains,

See how I combine a bindi with a leather jacket and make a bold statement about my duality? Look! I can go to a rave one night, and the next morning be cooking in the temple kitchen!

(LHH 1999: 148)

Thus, it is necessary to re-examine a point highlighted before, that of the writers who are the result of the existence of two simultaneous cultures.

Gender relationships are deteriorated because of the clash between different ways of thinking. It is initially unbelievable for a woman to get divorced, to leave her husband, to forget her religion and rebel against *the Indian/Hindu lifestyle*. It is only when this happens that stereotypes begin to fade away and women find their own identity.

Chapatti or Chips (2000), Nisha Minhas.

The story features two main characters. Dave, the English womanizer and Naina, the Indian virgin; a romantic comedy set in Milton Keynes taking the reader on a journey into the heart of an Indian household and on the other side in the land of babes, booze and bonking.

Naina's parents think their daughter to be the sweet, innocent virgin. Her body kept pure, untouched by another man, bound up by tradition. She will make the perfect bride to Ashok, the man chosen to be her husband, the man Naina has only met just the twice. Not only does he want her friendship but also her virginity. Unlike the rules she has been taught to impress her future husband, the couple defends a discourse of marriage based on happiness, the woman's economic freedom through a work of her own and the defence of the individual's real personality. Contrary to the traditional Indian husband-to-be he was nonconformist, intelligent, direct and opening his personality up. Nevertheless and despite this redefinition in the relationship between the couple, Naina will be caught in the dichotomy between her cultural limitations for being Indian and her need for freedom having been born in Britain and her desire for a white man, Dave.

While Aaron stood as the accomplishment of her cultural expectations, Dave fulfilled her desires for freedom and her sexual fantasies. While Indian people are subject to tradition, Dave also has traditions. Traditionally he only dates gorgeous women, he keeps a box of Kleenex in his car and he dumps his women after just three dates. An incorrigible womanizer who Naina should stay well clear of contrary to her wishes and desires.

The love –hate relationship between Naina and Aaron will develop in a process of mutual support and understanding that will end in love and protection. Together with Naina’s difficulties to cope with culture clash, Dave will have to confront the remembrance of a difficult childhood with a lack of care and affection from his parents. The relationship between Naina and Dave will not be free from the control and pressures by Kiran, Naina’s brother and a strict follower of the Indian way. Not only will he oppose his sister’s relationship with a white man, but he will also bring to the light the maximum number of stereotypes and clichés between the two cultures.

***Saris and Sins* (2003), Nisha Minhas.**

Kareena, British-born Asian woman content in her arranged marriage, ready to set the future alight with happiness. She marries Samir who is about to ruin her future with his secretive past, the maintenance of a mistress for six years. She becomes Samir’s past but she refuses to be so but to be his past, present and future and will do anything needed to keep him, including his arranged marriage wreck. Jordan, an ex -convict and Cloey’s ex -lover, and without a life of his own, was supposed to love Cloey until he died. There was only one thing for it, Cloey would have to wreck his relationship too.

The book concentrates on the struggles of Kareena coming to terms with her new life, the pros and cons of the Indian way, the struggles of adjusting to an arranged marriage. It follows her from the wedding night onwards. Her thoughts, worries, expectations and her fears as she begins to see a suspicious side to Samir, a side that her parents would expect her to ignore.

Her husband’s emotional insecurity affects his relationships with his wife, parents and his lover. He possesses a sense of guilt for not conforming to his parents’ expectations well from the start of the novel. Not only was he with a white woman but he was not brave enough to face his parents and tradition; he was not able to tell them that because he wanted to marry a white woman he had been wrongly educated leading to an identity crisis, “forever trying to be both Indian and English”(S and S 2003: 83).

Every time that he was about to tell his parents he went to bed with Cloey and as he considers being happy was above being a Sikh or a Catholic. He was also hesitant about his wife as he was also capable of keeping intelligent conversations with his wife. Out of all the characters around him Ryan is the only one trying to make him realise the evil in Cloey which “showed a great loyalty to Jordan” (*S and S* 2003: 210)

Another angle of the story follows Cloey, who has invested six years of her life in Samir, only for him to tell her that his parents have already picked his bride.

Passion and Poppadoms (2004), Nisha Minhas.

It is a novel that follows the antics of Marina [the Indian sandwich filler] and her quest to find happiness in love. Her parents have done away with the Indian arranged marriage system, giving her the unusual option [for Indian families] of finding her own man. Marina thinks it should be easy: her buxom, blonde best friend and flatmate, Emily, has been finding men for years.

Thomas is a successful owner of the Regency Hotel in Oxfordshire. He is happily in love with his unstable girlfriend, Nicole, and plans to marry her soon. Nicole hopes that Thomas’s obsession with his hotel diminishes after the wedding, because she is sick and tired of playing second fiddle to a hotel. He finally calls off the wedding and Nicole’s impression of Thomas is recast. He never loved her. “She was just his prize. The first-prize trophy in a competition between himself and a dead man.” (*P and P* 2004: 432)

The story follows Marina as she becomes smitten with Thomas. Believing very much in following her heart she prays for her love life to involve Thomas and sets about, in a very odd way, to bag him even though he’s already in love with another woman. But her flatmate, Emily, has other ideas. Nicole, his fiancée, has other ideas also. After Stuart’s lies concerning Thomas’ relationship with Marina, she becomes obsessed with any issue concerning Hindu culture. Even her imagination,

[...] was taking trips to places that her parents would be ashamed of. X-rated scenes in which Thomas was undressing a beautiful Indian woman and then making love to her with more passion, more excitement and more pleasure than he'd ever experienced with her.

(*P and P* 2004: 245)

Stuart becomes “the thorn in Thomas’ side” (*P and P* 2004:113) and plans to sleep with Nicole and “wreck something very dear to Thomas” (*P and P* 2004: 113). Even Thomas himself has other ideas. However, Marina believes in destiny and will not let obstacles stand in her way, even her parents’ decision to let her adopted uncle look for a Hindu man in Britain. Along with the story being very much a romantic comedy, it also focuses on the difficulties of cultures mixing and the problems of classes clashing.

To stop and wonder what her relatives would think, to worry whether she was good enough for Thomas, to question herself how far she would take this kiss if given the chance, would be bowing down to her insecurity. This was her life and if it flowed one way towards happiness—then why paddle upstream?

(*P and P* 2004: 372)

For every yin there is also a yang. For every good there is also a bad. And for every obstacle there is also a solution. Being different from his older girlfriends, so unique and true that he considered her “more than a breath of fresh air, a change for the better; she was a woman with such a fantastic inner self that her packaging never came into it” (*P and P* 2004: 439)

***The Pocket Guide To Being An Indian Girl* (2004), B. K. Mahal.**

With rules like these Susham Dillon desperately tries to make some sense of her life and to stop making a fool of herself. Born and bred in Dudley, she stumbles from one social slip to other confounding social expectations of what it means to be a good Indian girl. Chapter 1, *Forever a doomsday*, already begins with an event, the steling of sweets from a shop that clearly marks her difference from the rest, as seen in,

But me? I don't get the `Why have you come to steal? treatment. I get the insults straight away. Hope she goes bankrupt, the stupid, slimy maggot. Anyway, how am I supposed to know that everybody but an Indian girl can steal? Yes, your honour. I broke Rule No1: Never, ever steal from a corner shop.

(*TPG* 2004: 2)

This is followed by her family's introduction and the distance from her mother. Not only does she not want to be like her mother but she also criticises her over-protection concerning her brother.

College is a disaster, not least because of her annoying bottle blonde cousin Sammy, while Arjun complicates matters further. Her homelife is a living nightmare with her sister Kully's wedding festivities approaching. Her younger sister Kiz is a Bhangra Chick convinced of her imminent stardom in Bollywood, a girl whose "calling in life was to be an Indian heroine." (*TPG* 2004: 76), and who does not seem to realise, as is Sushi's opinion, that stardom "distorts reality, makes you want to talk to people you'd ignore if they were in the supermarket queue" (*TPG* 2004: 81)

In this guide to life, Susham lays out the rules that make an Indian girl more than just a prospect for another arranged marriage. Struggling with family politics and her own sense of right and wrong, she is a typical teenager, confused, rebellious and going through an identity crisis. It is through her and with the most obvious everyday happenings that she constructs what is supposed to be "A pocket guide to being an Indian girl", a set of rules that she breaks. With the words being an Indian girl she breaks with all the stereotypes and tries to say she was not born for another arranged marriage but for finding out whom she actually is.

It is on Chapter 4 that we know about the cause of her father's illness, the Rais. As his father states, "That Rai wants your mum" (*TPG* 2004: 136) Her most human side is brought to life not only feeling sorry for the discovery of her father's allotment by her

fault but also after discovering the cause of her father's illness and her father's attempts to compare himself with the incomparable, the Rais. She cannot even stand the truth hidden behind the three musketeers (Sammy, Arjun and Budgie)

A new character is introduced Kermit Fleabag, a school boy, "a person to be looked down because they aren't strong or nasty enough to answer you back" (*TPG* 2004: 147) and who becomes one of her best friends. Gurmit's unrecognised talent to play the guitar while a "bunch of performing penguins" (*TPG* 2004: 151) attracted everyone's attention.

After the wedding the girls brought a rabbit as a replacement for Kully. A few days later Kiz bought another one; "she'd chosen the pair at random, meaning they conformed to the laws of an arranged marriage" (*TPG* 2004: 201). In spite of their aunt's scolding they managed to achieve something. They finally gave them to the RSPCA, "Mum thought it would have been a god idea if they'd taken me as well." (*TPG* 2004: 201)

***Bindis and Brides* (2005), Nisha Minhas.**

The novel is a romantic comedy set in Essex about love, life and death. A story that follows two very different people from different worlds as their orbits collide. Zarleena is a pretty, twenty-eight year old British-born Asian woman trying hard to make a go of her life now she has separated from her husband, Armin, a man chosen for her in the traditional arranged marriage way. Indians are not meant to divorce as it brings shame and dishonour to the family. Joel is good in bed, good to look at and good with the gift of the gab. He ticks all the right boxes with most women. Unfortunately, when God was resting on the seventh day, the Devil was busy filling men like Joel with badness, infecting him with deceit, betrayal and unscrupulousness. So, when Zarleena's husband, Armin, turns up out of the blue to make her life hell again, she turns to Joel, a man she barely knows; a man who likes to sort things out that little bit differently than everyone else. A man who likes to do things the 'Joel' way. Certainly a man who she shouldn't be attracted to. If her husband was dead, then he would turn in his grave if he

knew Zarleena was having sexual thoughts for a white man. But Armin was far from dead. He was alive and kicking. A proud Indian man who took his heritage very seriously. And he was not going to let a white man stand in his way. And Joel was not going to let an Indian man stand in his.

The Marriage Market (2006), Nisha Minhas.

Funny, gorgeous, seriously sexy Aaron would be the perfect boyfriend - were it not for two minor character flaws: his all-consuming terror of commitment and his complete inability to remain faithful. Nevertheless, with his girlfriend Jeena faced with exile to India, Aaron conquers his fears and agrees to marry her - for one year only. It is an arrangement between friends. After one year, they will divorce - and things will be back to normal. But it was never going to be that easy. Aaron knows nothing of the Indian way, its culture, its rituals, its idealism. When Aaron marries Jeena, he marries her extended family too. The crises, chaos and complications that follow make for a witty and hilarious read. And despite his best intentions, love has a way of creeping up on a man just when he least expects it.

Being disowned after her marriage to a white man, Aaron's awareness of her situation will lead him to confront Indian parents and make them understand that their daughter's happiness is more important than the maintenance of the canons of tradition. Given her parents' failure to educate her as they should to become a good role model, Jeena's uncle will kidnap her to learn the Guru Granth Sabib and find her a husband in India. However, the growth of all love between Aaron and Jeena and her parents' negotiation of tradition will reverse the situation. They will accept her daughter's marriage and will redefine the old canons of tradition that have guided them through life.

Tall, Dark and Handsome (2007), Nisha Minhas.

Unfortunate in love and after some tormentous relationships, Saffron's decision not to initiate a relationship with an attractive boy coincides with Cory's lack of desire

for women who are only interested in his money. She is only interested in men who will appreciate her; men who will not cheat on her; men who will not break her heart. So when she meets the gorgeous Cory Roswell, Saffron decides he is not her type at all. Too tall, too dark and way too handsome. Their first encounter on a plane from India back into England will develop into a relationship full of lies and experiences that will alter the life of an independent, self-employed, freelance photographer and a multi-millionaire porn star. Saffron was adopted from an Indian orphanage at a very young age by English people and brought up very much as an Essex girl. She has difficulty in coming to terms with who exactly she is in the world: she obviously has Indian roots but does not know about her natural parents, their reason to abandon her in an Indian orphanage or her religion. She will only find out through a tattoo removed from her arm, with indication of her birth place, her family name and her religion when she was taken to England. She and Cory date and though he sets out on a pretence of being just a poor plumber the truth of his true source of income finally comes out. After initial rebuttal Saffron accepts Cory with his porn empire. Saffron's parents acknowledge that they had the tattoo removed from her and find photos of her where the tattoo is still inscribed; as an identity mark in India, Saffron is able to find her home village and mother. It is then when she realises she does not belong to India at all although this awareness alleviates the need to know where she comes from and allows her live a life without questions.

Appendix 6:***The Pocket Guide To Being An Indian Girl (2004) rules:***

- 1- Never, ever steal from a corner shop.
- 2- Keep your head down and be a good, demure, can't-look-you-straight-in-the-eye Indian girl.
- 3- Be distant and rude to those who yank at your hearstrings.
- 4- Never forget that you are a lesser human being than your brother.
- 5- Your mother is another human being who is better than you'll ever be, and don't forget it, 'cos she won't. She has power. You haven't.
- 6- Eat like you would if you were being filmed.
- 7- Don't ever go blonde. Who are you trying to kid?
- 8- Don't be ashamed when you find the guests turn up like lemmings-as soon as you've killed one, there's another 20 round the corner.
- 9- Privacy is something you aren't entitled to.
- 10- Don't walk around or hide under the stairs with shots of alcohol. If getting drunk is a necessity, get well and truly bladdered, then you won't feel the slap.
- 11- Indian girls only make the front page if they are landed a role in an Indian flick, had a forced marriage or run away. I had apparently done the last.
- 12- All personal, physical and mental disabilities should be kept within the confines of the home. We don't want people to think you are a wet mullet.
- 13- Don't even expect sympathy-especially when you're not Meena Kumari.
- 14- Never ask a relation who they are. That's disrespectful.
- 15- You can dream your dreams, but make them realistic ones. There ain't nothing funnier than a failure failing to realise their dream.
- 16- Never, ever be a background dancer in a song picturisation, because you won't be coming to a cinema near me.
- 17- Get used to parents dishing out punishment. It won't end till you're 70 or thereabouts.
- 18- Always brown your onions.
- 19- Never, ever be nice to a guy.
- 20- Don't stare out at football crowds walking past your window.

- 21- Don't expect sympathy from your mum when you get called a Pakee; she'll say it's your fault you got called one in the first place.
- 22- Do not swear at your Mum in front of other people. Even if it's done accidentally, you'll incur the wrath of the evil anti eye for many days to come, or at least until another scandal takes precedence.
- 23- Don't expect pocket money to increase in line with the rate of inflation or the general cost of living, and never, ever think of competing with your brother.
- 24- Always take pocket money, even when you are 90.
- 25- Don't drive yourself to your own pre-wedding party. It looks tacky and is bad omen for an already doomed marriage.
- 26- Break your leg before the wedding, but only if you are a guest.
- 27- Never, ever trip up the cameraman.
- 28- Santa's sleigh doesn't fly over our chimneys, even if you do leave him *roti* and *saag*.
- 29- Change your clothes at least three times at a wedding, otherwise you'll be accused of stinking. So what if I hadn't changed my suit three thousand times like she had (Worzel: her aunt). She was the one who was discontented with the way she looked; at least I knew what suited me.
- 30- Do not take any money at any function. You'll always be accused of stealing, even if you have a clean slate. When their jive was over, I was surprised by my disappointment at seeing them stop.
- 31- Never let your brother's friend offer you to get you his version of coke. He'll later deny all involvement in your drunkenness.
- 32- Always expect your mother to think the worst of you and expect your relations to argue with her.
- 33- Don't be happy at your sister's wedding, even if you're glad to see her go. Guests presume that the bride comes from a family with many domestic problems.
- 34- I was breaking rule Number 34: Do not loiter around the bar, even if you need to find the earring you've lost and the man in the green and yellow Florida shirt is stepping on it on purpose. I was told by Brummie Uncle to stay as far from the bar as possible or the wedding film would be used as blackmail. I suppose I

- should have done what he said, but there was no point, because I'd already been caught on camera.(182)
- 35- Avoid all cameras.(182)
- 36- Never tell someone they're pretty, soon as you do, they start thinking they're doing you a favour letting you look at them, let alone talking to you. That's why I now go around telling all beautiful people that they're the sort of cowpats flies wouldn't swarm around. I suppose I get my kicks like that. Nasty, isn't it? No, nastiness ain't got anything to do with it; just call me the equaliser. I'm a hypocrite, though, I really am, 'cos sometimes I want to copy Mrs Shee-Shee Raa-Raa Pooley with her candlewaxed legs and well-pressed clothes. But one thing I'll never do is go around billboard-style like the rais do. Ain't it funny that you're doing all the advertising and you aren't even being paid.
- 37- Don't even take the mick out of a Punjabi son's mother.
- 38- Beware: some people were born just to drag you into the depths of despair.
- 39- Don't be too keen to pick up money off the road if cars are coming. This also brings into play rule number 40:
- 40- Understanding is worse than overdressing, so aim to look like a Christmas tree.
- 41- I can't swim hahaha's persuaded me not to break rule number 41: When by a considerable amount of the natural kind, don't swim. It doesn't matter if you try with your clothes on, it still isn't appropriate.
- 42- Never, ever divorce. That option is taken away once you get married.
- 43- Never curse your sister after she's married. Just because you feel a punching doesn't mean you should give her reason to treat you like one.
- 44- I tried hard to remain true to rule number 44: never, ever acknowledge your friends in front of your mum.
- 45- Get used to your parents never apologising. It's impossible for them to be wrong.
- 46- Always take people's gifts to India without question. It doesn't matter if they've given you illegal drugs, your duty is to your community.
- 47- Remember to be polite.
- 48- Always comb your hair.
- 49- Do as Indians do when in Rome.
- 50- Beware of the lizards.

51- Don't talk to palm-readers about science.

Rule number 1 in India: don't stick your head out when sightseeing in a tempo.

